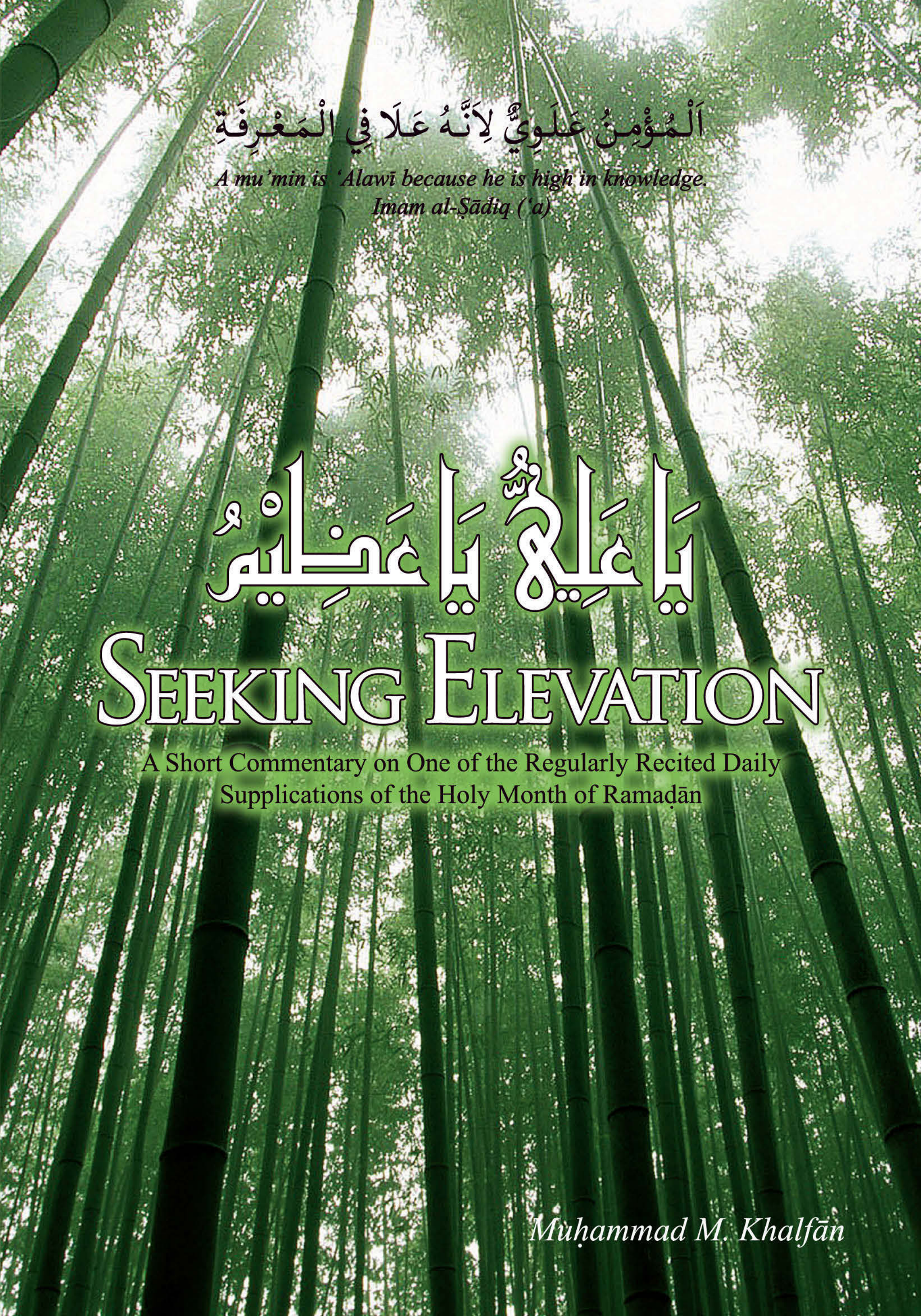


اَلْمُؤْمِنُ عَلَوِيٌّ لِأَنَّهُ عَلَا فِي الْمَعْرِفَةِ

A mu'min is 'Alawī because he is high in knowledge.
Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a)

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

SEEKING ELEVATION

A Short Commentary on One of the Regularly Recited Daily Supplications of the Holy Month of Ramaḍān

Muḥammad M. Khalfān

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Written by
Shaykh Muhammad M Khalfan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Transliteration Table

The method of transliteration of Islamic terminology from the Arabic language has been carried out according to the standard transliteration table mentioned below.

ء	ʾ	ض	ḍ
ا	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	ʿ
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	و	w
س	s	ي	y
ش	sh	ه	h
ص	ṣ	ة	

	Long Vowels		Short Vowels
ا	ā	ـَ	a
و	ū	ـِ	i
ي	ī	ـُ	u

swt - Free from imperfections and Exalted is He
ṣ - Prayers be upon him and his family
ʿaj - MAy God hasten his reappearance
ʿa - Peace be upon him, her or them

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ
اللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful
O Allah, shower Your mercy on Muḥammad and his Household.

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ، أَنْتَ الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ، الَّذِي لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ، وَهَذَا شَهْرٌ عَظَّمْتَهُ وَكَرَّمْتَهُ وَشَرَّفْتَهُ وَفَضَّلْتَهُ عَلَى الشُّهُورِ، وَهُوَ الشَّهْرُ الَّذِي فَرَضْتَ صِيَامَهُ عَلَيَّ، وَهُوَ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ، الَّذِي أَنْزَلْتَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنَ، هُدىً لِلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ، وَجَعَلْتَ فِيهِ لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ وَجَعَلْتَهَا خَيْراً مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ. فَيَا ذَا الْمَنِّ وَلاَ يُمَنُّ عَلَيْكَ، مُنَّ عَلَيَّ بِفَكَاكِ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ، فِي مَنْ تَمُنُّ عَلَيْهِ، وَأَدْخِلْنِي الْجَنَّةَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ.

اللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

WORD OF APPRECIATION

I wish to humbly thank the following brothers through whose support this work was realised:

1. Dr. Akbar Mithani, a well-known Dhākir-e Ḥusayn (ʻa), who requested this nondescript to complete a comprehensive commentary of this duʻā' that I had begun some years ago. In response to his good suggestion, I tried to write a complete, yet summarised, commentary of this supplication. May Allah perpetually encompass this noble Dhākir with His special mercy.

2. Shaykh Kumayl Rajani, a contemporary scholar residing in Qum, who assisted me in procuring details on the source and authenticity of the duʻā'. His immediate response and thorough research despite his multiple responsibilities, reveals the kind of excellent character this noble Shaykh enjoys. May Allah protect him and enable us to benefit from him more.

3. Mr. Yusuf Datoo & his brilliant family, who were my hosts in Mombasa as I tried to pen down this commentary. May Allah always keep them with Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and his infallible progeny in this world and the Hereafter.

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DEDICATION

O Allah, shower Your abundant mercy on Muḥammad and his Infallible Progeny.

O Allah, if this little contribution is accepted by Your Exalted & Tremendous Self, then send Your abundant mercy on Muḥammad and his infallible progeny, and bestow its reward entirely on them as a token on behalf of my noble parents, paternal and maternal grandparents, my deceased relatives, and all those who can benefit from its reward.

O Allah, shower Your abundant mercy on Muḥammad and his infallible progeny.

Proximity of Ḥaḍrat Maʿṣūmah (ʿa)
Qum al-Muqaddasah

INTRODUCTION: THE SOURCE OF THE DU'Ā'

Many of our great scholars have narrated this beautiful supplication in their prayer manuals. The following are worthy of mention:

a) Sayyid Raḍī al-Dīn ibn Ṭāwūs al-Ḥasanī (d. 664 AH) in his monumental prayer manual *Iqbāl al-A'māl* narrates this supplication with his chain of narration from Shaykh Hārūn ibn Mūsā al-Tala'ukbarā (d. 385 AH), a great and trustworthy narrator of traditions, from Imam Abū 'Abdillāh al-Ṣādiq ('a) and Imam Abū Ibrāhim al-Kāẓim ('a).[1]

b) Shaykh Ibrāhim ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Kaf'amī (d. 905 AH) in his well-known prayer manual *al-Miṣbāḥ* narrates this supplication from the book *al-Firdaws*.[2]

c) 'Allāmah Majlisī (d. 1110 AH) likewise narrates this du'ā' in his prayer manual *Zād al-Ma'ād* with a chain of narration leading to Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) and Imam al-Kāẓim ('a).[3]

Besides the aforesaid references, if one ponders upon this supplication very carefully, one will realise that it is a Qur'ānic supplication. The light of the Qur'ān glows throughout the verses.

---

1 Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl al-A'māl*, v. 1, pp. 79-80.
2 Shaykh al-Kaf'amī, *al-Miṣbāḥ*, p. 630.
3 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, p. 84.

CHAPTER 1

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

A Commentary on the phrase *Yā ʿAliyyu Yā ʿAẓīmu*
(O All-Exalted, O Tremendous)

. . . وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

… And He alone is *the All-Exalted*, *the Tremendous.* (2:255)

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, *and He is the All-Exalted, the Tremendous.* (42:4)

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Addressing Allah with the names *'Alī* and *'Aẓīm* shows a kind of personal distance, which is metaphysical and immaterial: both *'Alī* (All-Exalted) and *'Aẓīm* (Tremendous) reveal the extreme remoteness of the servant (*'abd*) from the Master (*Mawlā*). Although Allah says that He is existentially literally with us wherever we are: هُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ (*He is with you wherever you are*) (57:4) and that He intervenes between a man and his heart: يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ (*He intervenes between a man and his heart*) (8:24), due to our limitations and imperfections, we are extremely remote from His essential and existential exaltedness and tremendousness. Thus it befits us to call Him and employ the vocative particle *yā*. And in doing so we are also expressing our veneration before His infinite reality.

Concerning divine exaltedness, consider the following noteworthy traditions:

In a supplication that Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' ('a) is reported to have recited after *'Aṣr*, we read the following:

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ **الْعَلِيِّ الْمَكَانِ**، وَالرَّفِيْعِ الْبُنْيَانِ

> And praise belongs to Allah, *the Exalted in station*, and Lofty in [terms of] reality.[1]

In a supplication, Imam al-Ḥasan ('a) is reported to have said:

يَا ذَا الْقُوَّةِ وَالسُّلْطَانِ يَا **عَلِيَّ الْمَكَانِ** كَيْفَ أَخَافُ وَأَنْتَ أَمَلِيْ

> O Possessor of power and dominance, O *the Exalted in*

1 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 83, p. 85.

station, how should I fear while You are my hope?[2]

Observe that although the word *al-makān* employed in the above verse is normally rendered as a physical place or area of settlement, Allah is beyond time and place and thus we cannot say 'O High in place'. Rather it is apt to render it as 'O High in station', where *al-makān* is translated as *al-makānah* (station).

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1402/1981) when discussing the definition of *makān* in his magnum opus *al-Mīzān* says:

فالمكان هو مقر الشيء من الأرض ... وربما يطلق المكان المكانة لمستقر الشيء من الأمور المعنوية كالمكانة في العلم ...

Thus *makān* is the place where a thing is settled... and sometimes the word *al-makān* (place) signifies *al-makānah* (station) due to it being the place where spiritual things settle, such as station in knowledge.[3]

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) in his supplication of the Day of 'Arafah while praising Allah says:

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ... اَلْكَرِيْمِ فِيْ سُلْطَانِهِ، **اَلْعَلِيِّ فِي مَكَانِهِ**

Praise belongs to Allah... the Noble in his domination, *the Exalted in His station.*[4]

Here also notice the phrase '*makāni-hī*' is employed and it apparently signifies 'God's station or level of reality'.

Concerning divine tremendousness, Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ اللهَ عَظِيْمٌ رَفِيْعٌ **لاَ يَقْدِرُ الْعِبَادُ عَلَى صِفَتِهِ** وَلاَ يَبْلُغُوْنَ كُنْهَ عَظَمَتِهِ

Indeed Allah is the Tremendous and the Lofty; *His*

2 Al-Qayyūmī, *Ṣaḥīfah al-Ḥasan ('a)*, p. 76.

3 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, v. 11, p. 109.

4 Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl al-A'māl*, v. 2, p. 123.

> *servants cannot describe Him*, nor can they attain the zenith of His tremendousness.[5]

In conclusion, since Allah is distant in terms of exaltedness (*'uluww*) as well as tremendousness (*'aẓamah*), we call Him.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

These two divine names, according to a *ḥadīth*, were the first names that Allah chose for Himself; in a lengthy tradition narrated in *al-Kāfī*, Imam al-Riḍā ('a) is reported to have said:

> فَأَوَّلُ مَا اخْتَارَ لِنَفْسِهِ **اَلْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ**، لِأَنَّهُ أَعْلَى الْأَشْيَاءِ كُلِّهَا، فَمَعْنَاهُ اللهُ وَ اِسْمُهُ **اَلْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ** هُوَ أَوَّلُ أَسْمَائِهِ، عَلاَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَىْ ءٍ
>
> *Therefore the first [name] that He chose for Himself was al-'Aliyyu al-'Aẓīm*, because He is the highest of all things. Therefore He is Allah, and His name is *al-'Aliyyu al-'Aẓīmu*, and it is the first of His names, and He is above all things.[6]

In fact, according to divine mystics like Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), the name 'Alī in its real sense can only be attributed to Almighty Allah. In his *Kashf al-Ma'nā* when discussing the name 'Alī, he says:

> **العلي** بنيه مبالغه في العلو يكون له بها أقصاها بخلاف **الأعلى**، فإذا نسب **العلي** إلى ما دون أقصاها فما انصف
>
> The word *'alī* is a hyperbole that designates exaggeration in highness, the possessor of which has the remotest of all levels. This is contrary to the

5 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 1, p. 103.
6 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 1, p. 113.

> word *al-A'lā* (the Most High). Hence if *'alī* is attributed to a level lower than the highest, it is not fair.[7]

Therefore, as Imam al-Riḍā ('a), who knows the intricacies of the Arabic language, said in the aforementioned *ḥadīth*, Allah selected for Himself the name *'Alī 'li annahu a'lā al-ashyā'* (because He is the Highest of all things)'.

Commenting on this beautiful *ḥadīth*, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) in his *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī* says:

> فانّه العلي لذاته وكل ما عداه دونه في الرتبة وليس لاحد غيره علو الّا بالاضافة الى بعض ما عداه، وعلوّه الاضافي انما يستفيد منه تعالى ولقربه منه تعالى، وكل ما هو اقرب منه تعالى فهو اعلى رتبة في الوجود
>
> For indeed He is Exalted due to His [independently existing] Essence, and [thus] everything other than Him is lower in station, and for other than Him there is no exaltedness save in relation to some other [lower] entities; and it [i.e. other than Him] enjoys its relative exaltedness [only] from Him, the Almighty and [only] due to its proximity to Him; and [thus] whatever is nearer to Him, the Almighty, is of a higher station in terms of existence.[8]

In conclusion: Allah is Exalted in His Essence and thus He enjoys absolute exaltedness. All other entities are lower than Him. Among them, any entity which is closer to Him than others is more elevated and possesses relative exaltedness. Hence its elevated position is acquired through proximity to Allah, and is not essential.

Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1100/1680) comments on the

7 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kashf al-Ma'nā*, p. 96.
8 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, v. 3, p. 252.

abovementioned tradition in a more mystical sense and says:

> لله سبحانه العلو الحقيقي كما أن له العلو الإضافي والأول من خواصه سبحانه لا يشاركه فيه غيره ولهذا قال اختار لنفسه العلي العظيم وجعله أول أسمائه لعدم توقف تعقله على تعقل الغير
>
> To Allah, the Glorious, alone belongs the real highness (*al-ʿuluww al-ḥaqīqī*) as well as the relative highness (*al-ʿuluww al-iḍāfī*); and the first kind of highness is restricted to Him, the Glorious, and no one has any share of it, and that is why He said: He chose for Himself *al-ʿAlī al-ʿAẓīm* and made it the first of His names, because its comprehension does not depend on the comprehension of someone else.[9]

In attributing relative highness to Allah, perhaps Mullā Kāshānī was trying to point out the fact that all else who apparently possess relative highness are also the manifestations of His attributes, and hence there is no 'other' in the existential sense in the realm of existence.

يَا عَلِيُّ ...

O All-Exalted . . .

The word *ʿalī* stems from the infinitive *al-ʿuluww* which means highness or exaltedness. And since the first, highest, and primary cause of everything is Allah, He is *ʿAlī* (the Highest or All-Exalted).

Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. 395/1005) in *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah* defining the meaning of the divine name *al-ʿAlī*, says:

> الذي رتبته أعلى المراتب العقلية، **وهي المرتبة العلِيّة**، فَإِنّ ذاته المقدسة هي مبدأ كل موجود حسي وعقلي

9 Mullā Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Wāfī*, v. 1, p. 466.

> He is one who enjoys the highest station in intellectual terms, *and that is the station of causation*, for indeed His Sacred Essence is the source of every existent, whether sensible or intellectual.[10]

يَا عَلِيُّ . . .

O All-Exalted . . .

In our traditions the word *'alī* is also employed to signify the state of being above deficiencies. For example, when the Holy Qur'ān glorifies Allah, it says:

سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ **عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا**

> Immaculate is He, and *greatly exalted* above what they say! (17:43)

Imam 'Alī ('a) is reported to have said in one of his sermons narrated in the *Nahj al-Balāghah* as follows:

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ الْعَلِيِّ عَنْ شَبَهِ الْمَخْلُوقِينَ

> Praise belongs to Allah who is *above the resemblance of the creatures.*[11]

يَا عَلِيُّ . . .

O All-Exalted . . .

One should not conjecture that highness (*'uluww*) signifies physical altitude. In his supplication of 'Arafah, Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn ('a) says:

وَ أَنْتَ اللهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ، **اَلدَّانِي فِي عُلُوِّهِ، وَ الْعَالِي فِي دُنُوِّهِ**

10 Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī, *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah*, p. 375.
11 Imam 'Alī ('a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 213.

> And You are Allah, there is no god other than You, *the Close One in His highness, and the High in His closeness.*[12]

Observe here that although Allah is introduced as High (*al-ʿĀlī*), that does not make Him really distant. He is near (*al-Dānī*) and High (*al-ʿĀlī*) at the same time. This is because He is the infinite primary cause who is beyond the limits of matter, where physical distance makes sense. In simple words:

1. Since He is the primary cause, He is *ʿAlī* (Highest) and we, His creation, are lower in station of reality, and thus remote from His exalted being.
2. Since He is the primary cause, He is *al-Muḥīṭu bi kulli shay'* (One who encompasses everything (41:54)), and thus is closer to us than our jugular veins (50:16).

... يَا عَظِيمُ

. . . *O Tremendous*

The word *ʿaẓīm* stems from the word *ʿaẓamah* which signifies largeness (*kibar*) as well as strength (*quwwah*). Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004) in his *Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah* says:

العين والظاء والميم أصل واحد صحيح يدل على كبر وقوة

> *ʿAyn*, *ẓā'*, and *mīm* is a single and sound root that signifies largeness and strength.[13]

Hence when we speak about *ʿaẓamah* we speak of tremendousness, whether material or immaterial. With regard to Almighty Allah however, who is free from the confines of matter and finitude, *ʿaẓamah* signifies limitlessness and infinity.

---

12 Imam al-Sajjād (ʿa), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Supplication 47.

13 Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, v. 4, p. 355.

. . . يَا عَظِيمُ

. . . *O Tremendous*

In his *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, Ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210) defines the divine name *al-ʿAẓīmu* as follows:

> هو الَّذي جَاوَز قدْرُه وَجلَّ عن حدودِ العقول، حتّى لا تُتصور الإحاطة بكهنة وحقيقته
>
> He is one whose reality transcends the perimeters of the intellects and is beyond them, such that comprehending His Essence and reality cannot be imagined.[14]

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Yā ʿAliyyu Yā ʿAẓīmu (O **Exalted**, O **Tremendous**): Both the names *al-ʿAliyyu* and *al-ʿAẓīmu* have linguistic intricacies one cannot afford to overlook. They are in the form of *faʿīl*, which signifies:

a) An assimilate epithet (*ṣifah mushbihah*) signifying perpetuity, and
b) A hyperbolic form (*ṣighah mubālaghah*) signifying abundance.

Allah is always exalted and tremendous because His exaltedness and tremendousness are existentially essential (*dhātī*) and need no cause whatsoever.

Hence *Yā ʿAliyyu Yā ʿAẓīmu* would literally mean: *O One who is*

14 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, v. 3, pp. 259-260.

extremely and perpetually Exalted, O One who is extremely and perpetually Tremendous.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Calling Allah with specific divine names reveals the following:

a) The supplicant is praising Allah, for the meaning of praise is to express and manifest the qualities of perfection of the praised one (*iẓhāru kamālāt al-maḥmūd*). And by expressing the sublime names *al-'Aliyyu* and *al-'Aẓīmu* we are praising Him. This is really how every supplication must begin. Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

كُلُّ دُعَاءٍ لاَ يَكُوْنُ قَبْلَهُ تَحْمِيْدٌ فَهُوَ أَبْتَرْ

Every supplication before which there is no praise is *abtar* (without result).[15]

b) The supplicant has a specific need. When invoking *al-Shāfī*, for example, the supplicant seeks cure for himself or someone else, when invoking *al-Qawīyyu*, he seeks strength for himself or someone else, when invoking the name *al-'Alimu* he seeks knowledge from Allah. In our case, we are seeking elevation and tremendousness when we call Allah with the Names the All-Exalted and the Tremendous.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Invoking the divine names *al-'Aliyyu* and *al-'Aẓīmu* reveals the

15 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, p. 504.

supplicant's need for spiritual elevation (*'uluww*) and greatness (*'aẓamah*) in perfection; for the human being has a perpetual path towards absolute perfection (*al-kamāl al-muṭlaq*). Perhaps the following verses allude to this fundamental reality:

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ **وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ**

> To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, *and toward Allah is the destination.* (24:42)

. . . وَمَن تَزَكَّىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّىٰ لِنَفْسِهِ ۚ **وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ**

> ... Whoever purifies himself purifies only for his own sake, *and to Allah is the return.* (35:18)

Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) in one of his well-known poems of *Dīwān-e Shams Tabrīzī*, says:

ما ز بالاييم و بالا مي رويم * ما ز درياييم و دريا مي رويم

To the exalted realm we belong and to the exalted realm we are heading
To the sea we belong and to the sea we are heading

ما از آن جا و از اين جا نيستيم * ما ز بي‌جاييم و بي‌جا مي رويم

Neither do we belong there nor here
We came from no-where and are heading to no-where

لااله اندر پي الاالله است * همچو لا ما هم به الا مي رويم

'There is no god' comes after 'except Allah'
Like 'There is no god' we also are heading to 'except Allah'

قل تعالوا آيتيست از جذب حق * ما به جذبه حق تعالي مي رويم

'Say: come up!' is a sign of divine attraction
We are heading to the attraction of God, the Exalted

کشتي نوحيم در طوفان روحِ * لاجرم بی‌دست و بی‌پا می رویم
We resemble Noah's ark in the storm of the spirit
Therefore, we are going stumblingly

And at another point he says:

خوانده اي انا اليه راجعون * تا بداني كه كجاها مي رويم
Have you read 'unto Him we are returning'
So that you know to which places we are heading

اختر ما نيست در دور قمر * لاجرم فوق ثريا مي رويم
Our fortune star is not around the Moon
Thus we are heading beyond the remotest star

همت عالي است در سرهاي ما * از علي تا رب اعلا مي رويم
We have exalted aspirations in our minds
From the high (*'Alī*) to the Highest Lord we are going

Hence it behoves of us not to aspire for lower levels of the Heavenly pleasantries of the Hereafter, but rather to opt for the highest of the levels possible.

One of the manifestations of the divine names *al-'Aliyyu* and *al-'Aẓīmu* is Amir al-mu'minin 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ('a):

Manifesting the Divine Name al-'Aliyyu

In a lengthy tradition, the mother of Imam 'Alī ('a) is reported to have said that after the birth of Imam 'Alī ('a), when she wanted to come out of the Ka'bah, she heard a voice saying:

يَاَ فَاطِمَةُ سَمّيهِ عَليّاً، **فَهُوَ عَلِيٌّ وَاللهُ الْعَلِيُّ الأَعْلى**، يَقُولُ: إِنّيْ شَقَقْتُ اِسْمَهُ مِنْ اِسْمِيْ وَأَدّبْتُهُ بِأَدَبِيْ وَوَقَفْتُهُ عَلى غَامِضِ عِلْمى وَهُوَ الَّذيْ يَكْسِرُ

الْأَصْنَامَ فِيْ بَيْتِيْ

O Fāṭimah, name him ʿAlī, and *thus he is ʿAlī (high) and Allah is ʿAlī al-Aʿlā (the Highest of the high)*, He [Allah] says: Indeed I drew his name from My name, and fashioned him with My conduct, and taught him the ambiguities of My knowledge, and he is the one who will break the idols in My House.[16]

Hence, according to the above tradition Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) in reality manifested the attribute al-ʿAlī in himself.

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) in his *ʿIlal al-Sharāyiʿ* quotes a tradition from Jābir al-Juʿfī [a companion of Imam al-Bāqir (ʿa)] who is reported to have said:

وَقَالَتْ طَائِفَةٌ إِنَّمَا سُمِّيَ عَلِيّاً لِأَنَّهُ **أَعْلَى النَّاسِ عِلْماً** بَعْدَ رَسُولِ الله (ص)

And a group of people said indeed ʿAlī was named ʿAlī because *he was the highest of people in terms of knowledge* after the Apostle of Allah (ṣ).[17]

Ibn Shahr Āshūb (d. 588/1192) in his *al-Manāqib* says:

وَقَالَتْ طَائِفَةٌ وَسُمِّيَ عَلِيّاً **لِأَنَّهُ عَلاَ فِيْ حَسَبِهِ وَنَسَبِهِ وَعِلْمِهِ وَزُهْدِهِ وَغَيْرُ ذَلِكَ**

ʿAlī was named ʿAlī because *he was elevated in terms of lineage, family, knowledge, detachment from the world, etc.*[18]

Describing the exalted state of Amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī (ʿa), Āyatullāh Muḥammad Riḍā Rabbānī (d. 1423/2002) in his *Jalawāt-e Rabbānī* says:

16 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 195.

17 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿIlal al-Sharāyiʿ*, v. 1, p. 136.

18 Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *al-Manāqib*, v. 4, p. 246.

هُوَ عَلِيٌّ فِيْ ذَاتِهِ، هُوَ عَلِيٌّ فِيْ صِفَاتِهِ، هُوَ عَلِيٌّ فِيْ اَفْعَالِهِ

He is exalted (*'Alī*) in his essence, exalted (*'Alī*) in his attributes, exalted (*'Alī*) in his actions.[19]

Manifesting the Divine Name al-'Aẓīm

Both the Shia as well as Sunni narrators of tradition have mentioned the esoteric commentary of chapter 78, verse 2: '*'an al-Naba' al-'Aẓīm* (about the tremendous news)', that it refers to Imam 'Alī ('a): In a beautiful narration from Abū Ḥamzah, Imam al-Bāqir ('a) explaining the exegesis of *al-Naba' al-'Aẓīm*, says:

كَانَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ يَقُولُ: مَا لِلّٰهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ آيَةٌ هِيَ أَكْبَرُ مِنّيْ، **وَلاَ لِلّٰهِ مِنْ نَبَأٍ اَعْظَمُ مِنّي**

Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) would say: Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, does not have any sign superior than me, nor does Allah have any news greater than me.[20]

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

While invoking the above two divine names and seeking elevation and greatness, we must remember that in the well-known supplication of *al-Bahā'* of Imam al-Bāqir ('a), we are likewise taught to seek these two names:

اللّٰهُمَّ اِنّيْ اَسْئَلُكَ مِنْ عَظَمَتِكَ بِاَعْظَمِها وَكُلُّ عَظَمَتِكَ عَظيمَةٌ، **اللّٰهُمَّ اِنّيْ اَسْئَلُكَ بِعَظَمَتِكَ كُلِّها**

O Allah, indeed I ask You for that tremendousness of Yours which is the most tremendous, and every

19 Āyatullāh Muḥammad Riḍā Rabbānī, *Jalawāt-e Rabbānī*, v. 1, p. 27.

20 Sayyid al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 3, p. 15.

tremendousness of Yours is extremely tremendous; *O Allah I ask you by Your tremendousness in its entirety.*

Likewise we say:

اللّٰهُمَّ اِنّيْ اَسْئَلُكَ مِنْ عُلُوِّكَ بِأَعْلاهُ وَكُلُّ عُلُوِّكَ عَالٍ، اللّٰهُمَّ اِنّيْ اَسْئَلُكَ بِعُلُوِّكَ كُلِّهِ

O Allah, indeed I ask you for that exaltedness of Yours which is the most exalted, and every exaltedness of Yours is exalted; O Allah, indeed I ask you by Your exaltedness in its entirety.[21]

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

In the Verse of the Divine Throne (*Āyat al-Kursī*) both of these names have been introduced as belonging exclusively to Allah:

. . . وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

... And He alone is *the All-Exalted, the Tremendous.* (2:255)

When the article *al* is prefixed in the predicate of a sentence it signifies restriction and exclusiveness. Hence the last phrase '*wa Huwa al-'Aliyyyu al-'Aẓīm*' in *Āyat al-Kursī* would mean '*He alone is the All-Exalted and the Tremendous*.' Obviously it is only Allah who is Exalted and Tremendous in the primary and independent sense. If anyone therefore has any kind of exaltedness or greatness it is only His manifestation, and nothing else.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

21 Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, pp. 325-328.

If one establishes the exaltedness (*'uluww*) of God and His precedence in existence, one will easily understand His tremendousness (*'aẓamah*) and infinity, for existential necessity (*wujūb al-wujūd*) without infinity and non-compositeness (*basāṭah*) is impossible, since compositeness (*tarkīb*) reveals contingence (*imkān*) and a precedence of nonexistence (*'adam*). This philosophical exposition needs some amount of reflection to understand; therefore the reader is advised to reflect and intellectually soar.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Really seeking exaltedness and tremendousness necessitates action. In a very beautiful poem mentioned by scholars we are told:

بقدر الكـد تكتسب المعالي * ومـن طلـب العلا سهر الليالي

تـروم العـز ثم تنـام ليـلا * يغوص في البحر من طلب اللآلي

Exalted virtues are attained to the extent of struggle; whosoever seeks exaltedness must observe night vigil;

You are after honour, and yet you sleep at night? Whosoever seeks pearls dives in the ocean![22]

Hence, without maximising the precious time at night, in which, according to the Qur'ān, action has deeper impression on the soul (73:6), one should not anticipate perfection and greatness. In fact, according to a tradition of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī ('a): Indeed reaching [the proximity of] Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, is a journey that cannot be realised except by taking the night as a mount (إن الوصول إلى الله عز وجل سفر لا يدرك إلا بامتطاء الليل).[23]

22 Al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr*, v. 4, p. 661.

23 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 75, p. 380.

The following are some of the different verses of the Qur'ān and traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) that guide us to the path of exaltedness (*'uluww*) and tremendousness (*'aẓāmah*):

Verses and Traditions that Allude to Achieving Exaltedness (*'Uluww*):

1. The Holy Qur'ān says:

... إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ ...

> ... To Him ascends the pleasant word, and balanced action elevates it... (35:10)

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī[24], while explaining this verse in his monumental *Al-Mizān*, says that *al-kalim al-ṭayyib* (the pleasant word) signifies one's knowledge and belief [which is united with one's essence] and ascends to God, whereas that which is responsible to raise *al-kalim al-ṭayyib* is *al-'amal al-ṣālīh* (balanced action, an action that is free from the extremes of exaggeration (*al-ifrāṭ*) and negligence (*al-tafrīṭ*)).

Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

لَا تَرَى الْجَاهِلَ إِلَّا مُفْرِطاً أَوْ مُفَرِّطاً

> You will not see an ignorant person save in the state of exaggeration (*mufriṭan*) or negligence (*mufarriṭan*).[25]

Hence any balanced and good action performed with proper belief and knowledge would raise the human being and make him attain elevation.

One of the esteemed scholars who has covered this important principle in a number of his writings, is the contemporary mystic Āyatullāh Ḥasan Zādeh Āmulī.

24 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 1, p. 37.

25 Imam 'Alī ('a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, p. 479, Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ ed.

In his *Ganjīne-ye Gawhar-e Rawān* he says:

قوّه نظری را قوّه علّامه و نیروی بینش گویند، و عملی را قوّه عمّاله و نیروی کنش گویند.

این دو قوّه به منزلت دو بال نفس اند که بدانها به اوج حقائق طیران می کند تا به جنّة اللّقاء و جنّت ذات وّادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي می رسد

رئیس کمالات معتبر در قوّه نظری معرفه الله است و در قوّه عملی طاعة الله و به حسب مراتب فعلیّت این دو قوّه، انسان را درجات است. . .

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ

The theoretical faculty [of the human being] is called *ʿallāmah* and the power of insight, whereas that of action is called *ʿammālah* and the power of action.

These two faculties are like the two wings of the human soul by means of which it flies to the peak of realities until it reaches the Heaven of Meeting Him (*Jannat al-Liqāʾ*), the Jannah of the Divine Essence, and [the level of] '*...then enter My Garden of Heaven.*' (89:30).

The president of the essential perfections in the theoretical faculty is the gnosis of Allah (*maʿrifat Allāh*) and in the practical faculty is the obedience of Allah (*ṭāʿat Allāh*). And the human being has degrees [of perfection] in accordance with the levels of the actualisation of these two faculties...

[Allah says:] '*... To Him ascends the pleasant word, and balanced action elevates it...*' (35:10).[26]

In his beautiful anthology *Hezāro Yeh Nukteh*, he says:

و بدانی که بهشت و دوزخ در انسانند به این معنی که علم و عمل انسان

26 Āyatullāh Ḥasan Zādeh Āmulī, *Ganjīne-ye Gawhar-e Rawān*, p. 16.

سازند و هر کسی زرع و زارع و مزرعه خود است إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ سعی کن تا کلم طیب باشی و عمل صالح تو رافع تو باشد

And you should know that Heaven and Hell are within the human being [himself], for knowledge and action are the things that make the human being; and everyone is the tilling, the tiller, and the tilth of himself: '... *To Him ascends the pleasant word, and balanced action elevates it...*' (35:10). Struggle to be a pleasant word (*kalim-e ṭayyib*) and that your balanced action is your elevator.[27]

2. The Holy Qur'ān says:

. . . يَرْفَعِ اللّٰهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ . . .

... Allah will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge, in rank... (58:11)

This verse, akin to the previous verse, informs us that that which is raised is actually one's knowledge and belief. Here there is no mention of balanced deeds which is known to be the cause of the ascension of the one who has knowledge and faith.

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his *al-Mizān* says:

فإن الإيمان هو الذى يصعد بالعبد إلى مقام القرب، وليس للعمل الصالح إلا إعانة الإيمان وإسعاده في عمله كما قال تعالى: ﴿يَرْفَعِ اللّٰهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ﴾ المجادلة: ١١ حيث ذكر للرفع الإيمان والعلم وسكت عن العمل الصالح

For indeed it is faith that rises with the servant to the station of divine proximity; and balanced action does

27 Āyatullāh Ḥasan Zādeh Āmulī, *Hezāro Yeh Nukteh*, p. 867.

nothing save help the faith and make it successful through action; as He, the Exalted, said: '*... Allah will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge, in rank...*' mentioning faith and knowledge as the objects of elevation and being silent about balanced action.[28]

In conclusion, although balanced and good action (*al-'amal al-ṣāliḥ*), as explained in verse 35:10, is responsible to raise the human being, knowledge and faith united with the essence of human being are actually the ones that are raised and attain proximity. Therefore knowledge and faith are extremely important for the elevation of the human being.

Mullā Ṣadrā in his *Asrār al-Āyāt* says:

و درجات العارفين غير محصورة كما قال تعالى: ﴿يَرْفَعِ اللهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ﴾ إذ الإحاطة بكنه جلال الله غير ممكن و بحر المعرفة ليس له ساحل فكل له درجة بقدر قوة غوصه و خوضه فيه

And the stations of the gnostics are limitless, as He, the Exalted, said: '*... Allah will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge, in rank...*', for the exhaustive comprehension of divine majesty is impossible, and the ocean of gnosis is shore-less; thus everyone enjoys a level according to the strength of his diving and indulgence in it.[29]

3. The Holy Qur'ān says:

وَمَن يَأْتِهِ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ الصَّالِحَاتِ فَأُولَـٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَىٰ

But whoever comes to Him [the Lord] with faith and he has done balanced deeds, for such shall be the highest ranks. (20:75)

28 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 10, p. 16.

29 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asrār al-Āyāt*, p. 29.

Note that this verse is akin to the previous verse (35:10) and emphasises two important elements of elevation:

a) Faith
b) Balanced action

4. Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa) is reported to have said: On the Day of Judgement Almighty Allah will say:

يَا مَعْشَرَ الْخَلاَئِقِ، هَذَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَبِيْ طَالِبٍ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ) خَلِيْفَةُ اللهِ فِيْ أَرْضِهِ وَحُجَّتُهُ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ فَمَنْ تَعَلَّقَ بِحَبْلِهِ فِيْ دَارِ الدُّنْيَا فَلْيَتَعَلَّقْ بِحَبْلِهِ فِيْ هَذَا الْيَوْمِ يَسْتَضِيْءُ بِنُوْرِهِ وَلْيَتْبَعْهُ إِلَى **الدَّرَجَاتِ الْعُلَى مِنَ الْجِنَانِ**

O group of creatures, this is ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the vicegerent of Allah on His earth and His proof over His servants; so whosoever clings onto his rope in the abode of the world, must clung onto his rope today and seek light through his light, and follow him to the *exalted stations of Heaven.*[30]

Imam al-ʻAskarī (ʻa) is reported to have said that Almighty Allah said to Prophet Mūsā (ʻa):

يَا مُوْسَى ... وَاَنَّ شِيْعَتَهُ الْمُنْقَادِيْنَ لَهُ، اَلْمُسْلِمِيْنَ لَهُ وَلأَوَامِرِهِ وَنَوَاهِيْهِ، وَلِخُلَفَائِهِ، **نُجُوْمُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ الأَعْلَى**، وَمُلُوْكُ جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ

O Mūsā… and his [i.e. Imam ʻAlī (ʻa)'s] followers, obedient to him, submissive to him and his commands and prohibitions, and submissive to his successors, are *the stars of the higher Paradise* and the kings of the gardens of Eden.[31]

Clinging onto the rope of Imam ʻAlī (ʻa) is to assimilate his life and follow him in his thoughts, words, and deeds. Obviously, due to his infallibility, whatever he did was what Allah desired. He

30 Al-ʻĀmilī, *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, v. 1, pp. 353-354.
31 Al-Abṭaḥī, *al-Shīʻah fī Aḥādīth al-Farīqayn*, p. 534.

was a model of both towering faith and balanced action. Hence, following him would undoubtedly facilitate elevation in one's life.

5. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

أَعْلَى النَّاسِ مَنْزِلَةً عِنْدَ اللهِ أَخْوَفُهُمْ مِنْهُ

> *One who has the highest station near Allah from among the people*, is one who is most fearful of Him.[32]

In another tradition, the Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

أَنَا أَخْوَفُكُمْ لِلّٰه

I am the most fearful of Allah among you.[33]

And fear, we must understand, comes about as a result of knowledge and *ma'rifah.* Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

أَعْلَمُكُمْ أَخْوَفُكُمْ

> The most knowledgeable among you is the most fearful of you.[34]

أَخْوَفُكُمْ أَعْرَفُكُمْ

> The most fearful of you is one who enjoys the most recognition.[35]

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

مَنْ عَرَفَ اللّٰهَ خَافَ اللّٰهَ

Whosoever comes to know Allah, will fear Allah.[36]

32 Āyatullāh Rayshahrī, *Mīzān al-Ḥikmah*, v. 1, p. 824.
33 Al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, v. 13, p. 4.
34 Al-Wāsiṭī, *'Uyūn al-Ḥikam wa al-Mawā'iẓ*, p. 113.
35 Al-Wāsiṭī, *'Uyūn al-Ḥikam wa al-Mawā'iẓ*, p. 113.
36 *Risālah fī al-'Adālah*, p. 75.

Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (ʿa) in one of his supplications says:

سُبْحَانَكَ عَجَباً لِمَنْ عَرَفَكَ كَيْفَ لَا يَخَافُك

> You are free from imperfections; surprising is he who knows You, but does not fear You![37]

One who gains knowledge of Allah and His infinite attributes and realises his utter dependence on Him, will naturally be overcome by awe and fear. Hence in order to attract fear of Allah we should try to seek knowledge of Him, albeit within our limitations.

6. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرْآنِ فِي أَعْلَى دَرَجَةِ الآدَمِيِّيْنَ مَا خَلاَ النَّبِيِّيْنَ وَالْمُرْسَلِيْنَ

> *Indeed those intimate with the Qur'ān are in the highest station from among the human beings*, save the Prophets and the Apostles.[38]

In explaining this tradition, Al-Māzandarānī in his exegesis of *Usūl al-Kāfī* says:

المراد به من تعلّمه وحافظَه ووَاظب على تلاوتهِ والعمل بما فيه

> [*Ahl al-Qur'ān*] refers to one who learns, memorises, adheres to its recitation and acts according to its instructions.[39]

There are other narrations also that allude to the fact that reading the Holy Qur'ān in the transformative sense elevates a human being: Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) is reported to have said the following to his beloved companion Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar:

وَعَلَيْكُمْ بِتِلَاوَةِ الْقُرْآنِ فَإِنَّ دَرَجَاتِ الْجَنَّةِ عَلَى عَدَدِ آيَاتِ الْقُرْآنِ، فَإِذَا كَانَ يَوْمُ الْقِيَامَةِ يُقَالُ لِقَارِئِ الْقُرْآنِ اقْرَأْ وَارْقَ فَكُلَّمَا قَرَأَ آيَةً رَقِيَ دَرَجَة

37 *Jannat al-Amān*, v. 1, p. 83.

38 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, p. 603.

39 Mawlā al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Usūl al-Kāfī*, v. 11, p. 22.

And upon you is to read the Qur'ān, for indeed the levels of *al-Jannah* are equal to the verses of the Qur'ān; and when the Day of Resurrection will come to transpire, the reciter of Qur'ān will be told: Read and ascend! So whenever he would read a verse he would ascend [one level].[40]

This informs us that reciting the Qur'ān elevates the human being.

7. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

بِالصَّلاَةِ يَبْلُغُ الْعَبْدُ اِلىَ الدَّرَجَةِ الْعُلْيَا

Through prayer, a servant of Allah *attains the highest station.*[41]

Another well-known allusion that informs us that prayer elevates a person is the following well-known tradition:

الصَّلاَةُ مِعْرَاجُ الْمُؤْمِنِ

The prayer (*ṣalāt*) is an ascension of the believer.[42]

The reality that prayer elevates the human being and facilitates the proximity of Allah has been dealt with by many insightful scholars in their works on secrets of prayer, a very good example of which is the Persian masterpiece *Ādāb-e Namāz* of Imam Khumayni which has also been rendered into the English language.

8. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

اِنَّ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ جَوَادٌ يُحِبُّ الْجُوْدَ ومَعَالِيَ الأُمُوْرِ، وَيَكْرَهُ سَفْسَافَهَا

Indeed Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, *loves generosity and exalted matters*, and abhors insignificant matters.[43]

40 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 359.
41 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, p. 522.
42 Shaykh al-Shāhrūdī, *Mustadrak Safīnat al-Biḥār*, v. 6, p. 343.
43 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v. 13, p. 57.

Hence, one who aspires to climb higher must develop attributes of exaltedness, one of which is generosity and open-handedness. The expression employed to describe such attributes is *ma'ālī al-umūr* (exalted matters); the word *ma'ālī* originates from *al-'uluww* which signifies highness and exaltedness.

In his well-known Supplication of Noble Characteristics, Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn ('a) seeks for such exalted morals as follows:

وَهَبْ لِي مَعَالِيَ الْأَخْلاَق

And gift me with exalted characteristics.[44]

9. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

اَلْيَدُ الْعُلْيَا خَيْرٌ مِنَ السُّفْلَى، وَالْيَدُ الْعُلْيَا الْمُنْفِقَةُ وَالْيَدُ السُّفْلَى اَلسَّائِلَةُ، وَابْدَأْ بِمَنْ تَعُوْلُ

> The upper hand is better than the lower hand. The upper hand is the one which spends [in the way of Allah] and the lower hand is one which begs. And begin with the one whom you are [responsible for] supporting.[45]

10. Imam Amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī ('a) is reported to have said:

بِالصَّبْرِ تُدْرَكُ **مَعَالِيَ الأُمُوْر**

Through patience *exalted things are attained.*[46]

In another beautiful tradition revealing the great importance of patience, Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

إِنَّكَ لَنْ تُدْرِكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ مَا تُحِبُّ إِلاَّ **بِالصَّبْرِ** عَمَّا تَشْتَهِي

> Indeed you will never attain from your Lord what

44 Imam al-Sajjād ('a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Supplication 20.

45 Al-Iḥṣā'ī, *'Awāli' al-La'ālī*, v. 1, p. 141.

46 Al-Wāsiṭī, *'Uyūn al-Ḥikam wa al-Mawā'iz*, p. 188.

you love *save through patience* from what your self desires.[47]

In fact, if one reflects a little, one would understand that the entire spiritual journey to Allah that the spiritual masters teach, can be summarised in what is known as *ṣabr* (patience). This is because the entire journey is filled with challenges and requires one to work hard; and working hard is impossible for one who has no patience.

Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

مَنْ صَبَرَ عَلَى اللهِ وَصَلَ إِلَيْهِ

Whosoever observes patience for Allah, will reach Him.[48]

11. Imam al-Bāqir ('a) is reported to have addressed his son Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) as follows:

يَا بُنَيْ اعْرِفْ مَنَازِلَ الشِّيعَةِ عَلَى قَدْرِ رِوَايَتِهِمْ وَمَعْرِفَتِهِمْ، فَإِنَّ الْمَعْرِفَةَ هِيَ الدِّرَايَةُ لِلرِّوَايَةِ وبِالدِّرَايَاتِ لِلرِّوَايَاتِ **يَعْلُو الْمُؤْمِنُ إِلَى أَقْصَى دَرجَاتِ الْإِيمَان**

O my dear little son, know that the stations of our Shias are to the extent of their narrations and recognition (*ma'rifah*); for indeed *ma'rifah* is *al-dirāyah* (understanding) of the *riwāyah* (narration); and it is by the understandings of narrations that a believer attains *elevation to the topmost stations of faith.*[49]

12. Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

الْمُؤْمِنُ عَلَوِيٌّ لِأَنَّهُ عَلاَ فِي الْمَعْرِفَةِ

A believer is high-ranking (*'alawī*) because he has risen high in recognition (*ma'rifah*).[50]

47 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

48 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 71, p. 95.

49 *Ibid.*, v.1, p. 106.

50 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *'Ilal al-Sharāyi'*, v. 2, p. 467.

13. Imam al-Riḍā (ʻa) is reported to have said to Ibn Shabīb:

يَا ابْنَ شَبِيبٍ إِنْ سَرَّكَ أَنْ **تَكُوْنَ مَعَنَا فِي الدَّرَجَاتِ الْعُلَى مِنَ الْجِنَانِ** فَاحْزَنْ لِحُزْنِنَا وَافْرَحْ لِفَرَحِنَا وَ عَلَيْكَ بِوِلاَيَتِنَا

O son of Shabīb, if it would make you happy *that you are with us in the high stations of the gardens of Heaven* then be sad at our sadness and happy at our happiness; and upon you is our *wilāyah* (guardianship).[51]

14. Imam al-Riḍā (ʻa) is reported to have said:

وَمَنْ زَارَنِيْ فِيْ غُرْبَتِيْ كَتَبَ اللهُ لَهُ أَجْرَ مِائَةَ أَلْفِ شَهِيْدٍ وَمَائَةَ أَلْفِ صِدِّيْقٍ ... وَجُعِلَ فِي **الدَّرَجَاتِ الْعُلَى** فِي الْجَنَّةِ رَفِيْقُنَا

And whosoever visits me in my state of *ghurbah* [being away from my hometown], Allah would write for him the reward of a hundred thousand martyrs, a hundred thousand veracious ones... and he would be made our friendly companion *in the high stations in Heaven.*[52]

15. Amīr al-mu'minīn (ʻa) is reported to have said:

اَلْحُكَمَاءُ **أَشْرَفُ النَّاسِ** أَنْفُسًا

The wise ones (*al-ḥukamā'*) *are the most exalted* of people in terms of self.[53]

16. Imam Mūsā ibn Jaʻfar (ʻa) is reported to have said:

مَنْ أَعَانَ مُحِبًا لَنَا عَلىَ عَدُوٍّ لَنَا فَقَوَّاهُ وَشَجَّعَهُ حَتَّى يُخْرِجَ الْحَقَّ الدَّالَّ عَلىَ فَضْلِنَا بِأَحْسَنِ صُوْرَةٍ، وَيُخْرِجَ الْبَاطِلَ الَّذِيْ يَرُوْمُ بِهِ أَعْدَاؤُنَا فِيْ دَفْعِ حَقِّنَا فِيْ أَقْبَحِ صُوْرَةٍ، حَتَّى يَتَنَبَّه الْغَافِلُوْنَ، وَيَسْتَبْصِرِ الْمُتَعَلِّمُوْنَ، وَيَزْدَادُ فِيْ بَصَائِرِهِمْ اَلْعَالِمُوْنَ، بَعَثَهُ اللهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيْ **أَعْلَى مَنَازِلِ الْجِنَان**

51 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 193.

52 Sayyid al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-Maʻājiz*, v. 7, p. 182.

53 Āyatullāh Rayshahrī, *al-ʻIlm wa al-Ḥikmah fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, p. 108.

Whosoever helps our lover against our enemy, and strengthens and encourages him until he unravels the truth that reveals our merit in the best form, and unravels the falsehood which our enemies desire for repelling our rights in the ugliest form, until the negligent ones wake up and realise and those seeking knowledge are enlightened, and the insight of the knowledgeable ones increases, Allah would raise him on the Judgement Day in *the highest stations of the gardens of Paradise.*[54]

17. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said to Imam ʿAlī (ʿa):

يَا عَلِيُّ أَحْسِنْ خُلُقَكَ مَعَ أَهْلِكَ وَجِيْرَانِكَ وَمَنْ تُعَاشِرْ وَتُصَاحِبْ مِنَ النَّاسِ **تُكْتَبُ عِنْدَ اللهِ فِي الدَّرَجَاتِ الْعُلَىٰ**

O ʿAlī, behave beautifully with your family, neighbours, and whosoever you live with and accompany from among the people, *and you would be recorded near Allah in the high stations.*[55]

18. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

دَخَلْتُ الْجَنَّةَ فَسَمِعْتُ صَوْتَ اِنْسَانٍ، فَقُلْتُ: مَنْ هَذَا؟ قَالُوا: اَلْحَارِثُ بْنَ النُّعْمَان الأَنْصارِيّ، كَانَ بَارًا بِوَالِدَيْهِ، **فَصَارَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الدَّرَجَاتِ الْعُلَىٰ**

I entered the Paradise and heard someone's voice. I asked: Who is this? They said: He is al-Harith ibn al-Nu'man al-Ansari. He was virtuous to his parents, *and became from among those who enjoy lofty stations.*[56]

19. Amīr al-mu'minīn (ʿa) is reported to have said:

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54 ʿAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 7, p. 226.

55 Ibn Shuʿbah, *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl*, p. 14.

56 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v.15, p. 176.

مَارَفَعَ اِمْرَءًا **كَهِمَّتِهِ**، وَلاَ وَضَعَهُ كَشَهْوَتِهِ

Nothing raises a person like his aspiration, and nothing drops him like his base desire.[57]

20. Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

أَعْدَى عَدُوٍّ لِلْمَرْءِ غَضَبُهُ وَشَهْوَتُهُ، فَمَنْ مَلَكَهَا **عَلَتْ دَرَجَتُهُ** وَبَلَغَ غَايَتَهُ

The worst enemy of a person is his anger and base desires, and whosoever dominates them *his station rises* and he attains his goal.[58]

21. Isḥāq ibn 'Ammār is reported to have heard from Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a):

وَمَوْضِعُ قَبْرِهِ مِنْ يَوْم دُفِنَ رَوْضَةٌ مِنْ رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ وَمِنْهُ مِعْرَاجٌ **يُعْرَجُ فِيهِ بِأَعْمَالِ زُوَّارِهِ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ** وَمَا مِنْ مَلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ يَسْأَلُونَ الله (أَنْ يَأْذَنَ لَهُمْ) فِي زِيَارَةِ قَبْرِ الْحُسَيْنِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ)

And the place of his (Imam al-Ḥusayn ('a)'s) grave from the day he was buried, is an aromatic and beautiful garden from the gardens of Heaven. And from there is the ascension; *the actions of his visitors are raised from there toward the higher realm*, and there is no angel in the heaven nor in the earth save that he asks Allah to permit him to visit the grave of al-Ḥusayn ('a).[59]

Traditions that Allude to Achieving Greatness (*'Aẓamah*):

1. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ أَعظَمَ النَّاسِ مَنزِلَةً عِندَ الله يَومَ القيامَةِ أَمشاهُم فِيْ أَرضِهِ بِالنَّصيحَةِ لِخَلقِهِ

57 Āyatullāh Rayshahrī, *Mīzān al-Ḥikmah*, v. 4, p. 3468.

58 Al-Ṭabrasī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v. 12, p. 12.

59 Shaykh al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, v. 10, p. 400.

Indeed the greatest of people in terms of rank near Allah on the Day of Resurrection, is one who walked most in His land with advice for His creatures.[60]

This reveals how important the state of selflessness is. One who frequents in giving good advice to others is a selfless human being who yearns for their emancipation.

2. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

مَنْ تَوَاضَعَ لِلّٰهِ **عَظَّمَهُ اللّٰهُ وَرَفَعَه**

Whosoever humbles himself for Allah, *Allah would make him great and raise him...*[61]

3. Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

عَظِّمُوْا أَقْدَارَكُمْ بِالتَّغَافُلِ عَنِ الدَّنِيِّ مِنَ الأُمُوْرِ

Increase your values in terms of greatness by disregarding insignificant issues.[62]

4. Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

وَمَنْ تَعَلَّمَ وَعَمِلَ وَعَلَّمَ لِلّٰهِ **دُعِيَ فِيْ مَلَكُوْتِ السَّمَاوَاتِ عَظِيْمًا**

And one who learns, practices, and teaches for the sake of Allah, *will be called 'great' in the celestial realm of the heavens.*[63]

5. Imam Mūsā ibn Jaʻfar ('a) is reported to have said to Hishām ibn Ḥakam:

يَا هِشَامُ إِنَّ الْعَاقِلَ لاَ يَكْذِبُ وَإِنْ كَانَ فِيْهِ هَوَاهُ ... **وَإِنَّ أَعْظَمَ النَّاسِ قَدْرًا** اَلَّذِيْ لاَ يَرَى الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْسِهِ خَطَرًا

60 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, p. 208.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
62 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v.11, p. 188.
63 ʻAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 2, p. 27.

O Hishām, indeed one who employs his intellect does not lie, even if his desire is in that… *and indeed the greatest of people in terms of value* is one who does not consider the world important for himself.[64]

6. Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a), describing the great scholars, is reported to have said to his close disciple Kumayl ibn Ziyād:

أُوْلَئِكَ وَاللهِ الأَقَلُّوْنَ عَدَدًا **وَالأَعْظَمُوْنَ قَدْرًا** ... وَصَحِبُوْا صَفْحَةَ الدُّنْيَا بِأَبْدَانٍ أَرْوَاحُهَا مُعَلَّقَةٌ بِالْمَحَلِّ الأَعْلَى. أُولَئِكَ خُلَفَاءُ اللهِ فِيْ أَرْضِهِ وَالدُّعَاةُ إِلَى دِيْنِهِ. آه آه شَوْقًا إِلَى رُؤْيَتِهِمْ

Indeed these are very few in number, *but very great in terms of value* … They accompanied the page of the world with their bodies, while their spirits were suspended to the exalted place. These are the vicegerents of Allah on His earth and callers toward His religion; *āh*, *āh*, how I yearn to see them.[65]

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Seeking exaltedness and tremendousness is actually aspiring to journey to Allah and Hisproximity. The Holy Qur'ān has beautifully portrayed the fact that the human being, after having been created in the most beautiful mould, has been plunged into the lowest realm:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ. ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ.

Indeed We created man in the most beautiful of forms;

64 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v.1, p. 19.
65 Imam 'Alī ('a), *Nahj al-Balāghah*, v. 4, p. 37.

> then We relegated him to the lowest of the low, except those who have faith and do balanced deeds, for them there will be an everlasting reward. (95:4-6)

Hence it is through belief (*al-īmān*) and balanced action (*al-ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ*) that the human being can ascend to attain exaltedness and greatness. The Exalted Creator legislated laws of worship that really serve as means of the ascension of the human being. The best of these acts of worship is the canonical prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) which some traditions call *khayru mawḍūʿ* (the best worship legislated),[66] some *ʿamūd al-dīn* (the pillar of religion),[67] and some *miʿrāj al-muʾmin* (ascension of the believer).[68] Hence every human being has the opportunity five times a day to ascend to his Creator and attain elevation.

Fasting likewise is a means to elevate the human being so high that he unites with his Lord. In a beautiful sacred tradition Allah is reported to have said: Fasting is for Me and I Myself am its reward (الصوم لي وأنا أجزي به).[69] Ḥajj, which literally means *qaṣd* (intention), is also a journey to the Only Beloved and a path towards elevation and greatness. The Holy Qurʾān says:

فَفِرُّوا إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ إِنِّي لَكُم مِّنْهُ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ

> [Say,] '*So flee toward Allah.* Indeed I am a manifest warner to you from Him.' (51:50)

Commenting on this, Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) is reported to have said:

66 This is a reference to a tradition of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) where, after being asked by his close companion Abū Dharr what *Ṣalāt* is, he is reported to have said 'the best of what has been legislated (*khayru mawḍūʿ*)'; ref: Shaykh al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿah*, v. 5, p. 248.

67 This is a reference to a tradition of Imam al-Bāqir (ʿa); ref: Aḥmad al-Barqī, *al- Maḥāsin*, v.1, p. 44.

68 This is a reference to a tradition of the Holy Prophet (ṣ); ref: al-Shāhrūdī, *Mustadrak Safīnat al-Biḥār*, v. 6, p. 343.

69 ʿAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v.29, p. 259.

‘It means intend Allah (*ay ḥujjū ilā Allāh*)’[70] thus indicating that Ḥajj is not merely visiting the House of God and circumambulating around it, but rather it is to actually meet the Owner of the House. Although it involves a tiresome physical journey, its fundamental purpose is to be embraced by the Only Beloved. Thus it is a spiritually upward journey towards exaltedness and greatness.

If a person reflects on all the obligations that Allah has legislated for man, he will come to realise that they are meant to bestow elevation and greatness to him. Hence it is imperative for us to take all the acts of worship very seriously. The insightful scholars through their struggles have guided us to some of the secrets of worship, and hence we must make a point to read their works[71] and apply their teachings and examples in our acts of worship.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Unlike many of us who recite supplications and conceptualise their meaning during recitation, the exalted ones who occupy very lofty stations vision and see the reality as they express the same. The infallible Imam (‘a) who has taught us to recite this supplication does not conceptualise it when reciting it, but rather visions the attributes of exaltedness and tremendousness. Hence he enjoys visioning the two attributes and then he expresses the reality that he beheld. Of course we must not be mistaken to think that attributes of Allah which are infinite in nature can be captured and fathomed. Although such kind of knowledge of the divine

70 Mullā Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī*, v. 5, p. 74.

71 Examples of such works are the *Ādāb al-Ṣalāt* and the *Sirr al-Ṣalāt* of Imam Khumayni and the *Ādāb al-Sharī‘ah* of Sayyid Ḥaydar al-Āmulī. All these have been rendered into the English language and hence it is important for the true aspirants to read and reflect on them so that their devotions turn qualitatively superior and serve as means of elevation.

attributes is presential, it is according to the capacity of the beholder.

In his well-known work on the exegesis of *Du'ā' al-Saḥar*, Imam Khumayni when explaining the first verse, alludes to the reality that the supplication of the spiritual wayfarer is the outcome of his spiritual intuitions.[72] Hence expressions of the infallible Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) who enjoy very exalted positions near Allah must not be reckoned to be mere conceptualisations. They express realities that they actually vision and see.

Indeed, how remote are we who just conceptualise and express our feelings from those who vision the reality through their hearts and express the same?

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Seeking superficial exaltedness and greatness is always a negative endeavour, and hence must be distinguished from the positive exaltedness and greatness for which the human being was created. When one, for example, out of arrogance and pride seeks higher worldly positions for the sake of manifesting personal pride, deeper attachment to the world, negative domination, oppression, etc., he is actually seeking a shadow and mirage and not the reality. The Holy Qur'ān condemns such superficial transitory aspirations which represent the scum (*al-zabad*) that gathers on the water and fades with time. Pharaoh and his supporters are examples of those who practiced and opted for such worldly exaltedness.

In chapter 44, verse 31, Allah says:

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72 Imam Khumayni, *Sharḥ Du'ā' al-Saḥar*, p. 16.

وَلَقَدْ نَجَّيْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ. مِن فِرْعَوْنَ ۚ **إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَالِيًا مِّنَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ**

> Certainly We delivered the Children of Israel from a humiliating torment, from Pharaoh; *surely he was a high one of the profligates.* (44:30-31)

Observe here that Pharaoh is introduced as *'innahu kāna 'alīyan min al-musrifīn* (surely he was a high one of the profligates)'. However such 'highness' is far from being a merit.

In chapter 23, verses 45-46, Allah says:

ثُمَّ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ وَأَخَاهُ هَارُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ. إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَكَانُوا **قَوْمًا عَالِينَ**

> Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron with Our signs and a manifest authority, unto Pharaoh and his council; but they waxed proud, and they were a *lofty people.* (23:45-46)

Here the phrase 'and they were a lofty people (*wa kānū qawman 'ālīn*)' refers to their negative disposition of domination. Mullā Fayḍ Kāshānī among other exegetes of the Qur'ān, explaining the word *'ālīn* say that it means *mutakabbirīn* (proud people).[73]

In chapter *al-Naml*, Almighty Allah informs us that despite having conviction of the truth of His signs, Pharaoh and his supporters rejected them out of pride, a phenomenon that is very astounding. Allah employs the word *'uluww* (highness) to signify their proud character. The Holy Qur'ān says:

فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْهُمْ آيَاتُنَا مُبْصِرَةً قَالُوا هَـٰذَا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ. وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

73 Mullā Fayḍ Kāshānī, *al-Asfā fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 2, p. 822.

> But when Our signs came to them visibly, they said, This is a manifest sorcery and they denied them, though their souls gained conviction about them (*wastayqanat-hā anfusuhum*), wrongfully and out of pride (*'uluwwan*). Behold, how was the end of the workers of corruption! (27:13-14)

The Holy Qur'ān also mentions the disobedient character of the children of Israel who, despite having been continuously favoured by Allah, behaved arrogantly:

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا

> And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book: You shall do corruption in the earth twice, and you shall ascend exceedingly high in your corruption (*wa lata'lunna 'uluwwan kabiran*). (17:4)

Here the phrase '...and you shall ascend exceedingly high in your corruption (*wa lata'lunna 'uluwwan kabiran*)' refers to their arrogant and disobedient character.

After mentioning the end of Qārūn, who tried to defame Prophet Mūsā ('a) but by divine command was swallowed by the earth, Almighty Allah says in the Qur'ān:

تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ **لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا** فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا ۚ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

> That is the abode of the Hereafter which We shall grant to those *who do not desire to domineer* in the earth nor to cause corruption, and the outcome will be in favour of the God-wary. (28:83)

In this verse Almighty Allah informs mankind that the Hereafter

is for those who do not desire to wrongfully dominate in the earth. Allah employs the expression '*lā yurīdūna 'uluwwan* (who do not desire to domineer)'. Hence *'uluww* in this negative sense is reprehensible.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

In the Arabic language, when we wish to call someone and say 'come!' we employ expressions such as *ta'āl*, *aqbil ilayya*, *halumma*, *ilayya i'tī*, *ji'* (*huna*), etc. Although they seem to be synonyms, they have shades of differences worthy of consideration.

The word *ta'āl* is worthy of reflection. It does not simply mean 'come' but means 'come up'. Its root is the word *'uluww* (highness).[74]

The Holy Qur'ān employs this word and actually informs the readers of the means of elevation and highness. Consider the following verses:

In chapter 3, verse 64, Allah says:

> قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ اللهِ ...
>
> Say, 'O People of the Book! *Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship none but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him*, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah...' (3:64)

74 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradātu Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, p. 584.

In this verse the Holy Prophet (ṣ) is told by Allah to invite the People of the Book to the common word of worshipping Allah only and not ascribing any partners to Him. The phrase Allah teaches the Prophet (ṣ) to utter is *ta'ālaw...* which literally means 'come up!' thus indicating the reality that accepting *tawḥīd* (oneness of God) elevates the human being.

In chapter 3, verse 167, Allah says:

... وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ **تَعَالَوْا قَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوِ ادْفَعُوا** ۖ قَالُوا لَوْ نَعْلَمُ قِتَالًا لَّاتَّبَعْنَاكُمْ ۗ هُمْ لِلْكُفْرِ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْهُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ ۚ يَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِهِم مَّا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَكْتُمُونَ

> ... When they [the hypocrites] were told: '*Come, fight in the way of Allah, or defend [yourselves],*' they said, 'If we knew any fighting, surely we would have followed you.' That day they were nearer to unfaith than to faith. They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, and Allah knows best whatever they conceal. (3:167)

In this verse the hypocrites are invited to fight in the way of Allah, but they bring about false excuses. When they are invited, the phrase *ta'ālaw* is employed which literally means 'come up!' and thus reveals that fighting in the way of Allah is a means of ascension and elevation.

In chapter 4, verse 61, Allah says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ **تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَإِلَى الرَّسُولِ** رَأَيْتَ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنكَ صُدُودًا

> And when they are told, '*Come to what Allah has sent down and [come] to the Apostle,*' you see the hypocrites keep away from you aversely. (4:61)

In this verse we are told that when the hypocrites are invited to what Allah has sent down (i.e. the Qur'ān) and to the commands of the Prophet (ṣ), they keep away from the Prophet (ṣ) aversely. Here also the word *ta'ālaw* (which literally means 'come up!') is employed for inviting to the Qur'ān and the Prophet (ṣ); this reveals that following the Qur'ān and the Prophet (ṣ) is a means of ascension and elevation.

In chapter 5, verse 104, there is a similar invitation to the disbelievers and polytheists. Allah says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ **تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَإِلَى الرَّسُولِ** قَالُوا حَسْبُنَا مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا ۚ أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

> And when they are told, '*Come to what Allah has sent down and [come] to the Apostle*,' they say, 'Sufficient for us is what we have found our fathers following.' What, even if their fathers did not know anything and were not guided?! (5:104)

Exegetes[75] of the Qur'ān say that the verse speaks of the Prophet's invitation to the disbelievers to follow the Book of Allah and His Messenger. Here again observe the word *ta'ālaw* is employed for invitation.

In chapter 63, verse 5, Allah says:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ **تَعَالَوْا يَسْتَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ** لَوَّوْا رُءُوسَهُمْ وَرَأَيْتَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ وَهُم مُّسْتَكْبِرُونَ

> And when it is said to them, '*Come now and God's Messenger will ask forgiveness for you*', they twist their heads, and thou see them turning their faces away, waxing proud. (63:5)

Here the hypocrites are invited to the opportunity of the Prophet

75 Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṭayyib, *Atyab al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 4, p. 484.

(ṣ) asking for their forgiveness. Such invitation is made once again by employing the word *taʿālaw* thus indicating that if they are truly penitent and the Prophet (ṣ) seeks forgiveness for them, they would be emancipated and thereby ascend.

There are other verses that also employ the same mode of expression. We must therefore try to reflect on them and find the means of elevation and ascension that they clearly display for us.

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

A reality that the insightful scholars mention is that the Most High and Tremendous leaves no room for any kind of otherness (*ghayr*) whatsoever: intellectually speaking, an infinite being cannot accept a second. Hence whatever otherness we behold are loci of manifestation (*maẓāhir*) of His attributes and not independent entities as conceived by those who have sufficed themselves with the two eyes[76] of the world.

Perhaps a beautiful allusion to this reality of divine infinity, is expressed by Amīr al-mu'minīn (ʿa) in his well-known supplication that he taught to his close companion Kumayl ibn Ziyad al-Nakha'i. In it he says:

وَبِعَظَمَتِكَ الَّتِي مَلأَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

And by Your tremendousness that has filled everything.[77]

76 There is a beautiful hadith from Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) who is reported to have said: 'Indeed Allah created four eyes for the people, two physical eyes with which they see the matters of the world, and two inner eyes with which they see the matters of the Hereaf- ter; and indeed our true followers (Shias) possess four eyes, whereas Allah blindfolded the two inner eyes of our opponents.' [Al-Shāhrūdī, *Mustadrak Safīnat al-Biḥār*, v. 1, p. 361].

77 Shaykh ʿAbbās Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Duʿā' Kumayl, p. 114.

In other words, ‘*O Allah, You encompass everything in the most accurate meaning of the word.*’ In the same supplication, Amir al-mu’minīn (‘a) alludes to the exaltedness and highness of Allah in terms of ontological and existential sovereignty. He says:

وَبِسُلْطَانِكَ الَّذِي **عَلاَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ**

And by Your sovereignty *that is above everything*.[78]

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Seeking elevation is observed in the different kinds of aspirations expressed by the servants of God.

In worship, for example, some aspire for the pleasures of the Hereafter, some are overtaken with fear of perpetual damnation, and some ardently seek the proximity of Allah. In the expression of the Qur’ān, this third category are called *muqarrabūn* (those brought close to Allah). Their exalted aspiration is His proximity (*qurb*) and pleasure (*riḍā*).

Amīr al-mu’minīn (‘a) is reported to have said:

> إِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللّٰهَ رَغْبَةً فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ التُّجَّارِ، وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللّٰهَ رَهْبَةً فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الْعَبِيْدِ، وَإِنَّ قَوْمًا عَبَدُوا اللّٰهَ شُكْرًا فَتِلْكَ عِبَادَةُ الْأَحْرَارِ وَهِيَ أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ
>
> Indeed a people worship Allah desirously, and that is the worship of merchants, and indeed a people worship Allah fearfully, and that is the worship of slaves; and indeed a people worship Allah thankfully, and that is the worship of freemen, and that is the best kind of worship.[79]

78 *Ibid.*

79 Ibn Shu‘bah, *Tuḥaf al-‘Uqūl*, p. 246.

Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī in his *Sharḥ Nibrās al-Hudā* refers to the third category as *arbāb al-himam al-ʿāliyah* (those who possess exalted aspirations),[80] who realise that the purpose of creation is attaining divine proximity and the vision of the Beloved. Hence those who really aspire to occupy the most elevated position must struggle to worship Allah only out of love for Him and gratitude to Him.

Other Interesting Allusions to Different Levels

Other noteworthy hadiths that show the different levels of the aspirations of the human beings in terms of exaltedness and greatness are as follows:

1. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

> اَلْقَلْبُ ثَلاَثة أَنْوَاعٍ: قَلْبٌ مَشْغُوْلٌ بِالدُّنْيَا، وَقَلْبٌ مَشْغُوْلٌ بِالْعُقْبَى، وَقَلْبٌ مَشْغُوْلٌ بِالْمَوْلَى، أَمَّا الْقَلْبُ الْمَشْغُوْلُ بِالدُّنْيَا لَهُ الشِّدَّةُ وَالْبَلاَءُ، وَأَمَّا الْقَلْبُ الْمَشْغُوْلُ بِالْعُقْبَى فَلَهُ الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَى، وَأَمَّا الْقَلْبُ الْمَشْغُوْلُ بِالْمَوْلَى فَلَهُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْعُقْبَى وَالْمَوْلَى
>
> Hearts are of three kinds: the heart that is engaged with the world (*al-dunyā*), the heart that is engaged with the Hereafter (*al-ʿuqbā*), and the heart that is engaged with the Beloved (*Mawlā*). The heart that is engaged with the world has severity and trial; as for that which is engaged in the Hereafter, it has exalted stations; and as for the heart that is engaged with the *Mawlā*, it has the world, the Hereafter, and the *Mawlā* as well.[81]

2. Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) is reported to have said:

> إِذَا تَخَلَّى الْمُؤْمِنُ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا سَمَا وَ وَجَدَ حَلاَوَةَ حُبِّ اللهِ وَكَانَ عِنْدَ أَهْلِ الدُّنْيَا

80 Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ Nibrās al-Hudā*, p. 92.

81 Āyatullāh Rayshahrī, *Mīzān al-Ḥikmah*, v.4, p. 3473.

كَأَنَّهُ قَدْ خُوْلِطَا وَإِنَّمَا خَالَطَ الْقَوْمُ حَلاَوَةَ حُبِّ اللهِ، فَلَمْ يَشْتَغِلُوْا بِغَيْرِهِ

When a believer withdraws himself from the world he soars and tastes the sweetness of the love of Allah, and he is to the people of the world like one who is deranged, and surely only the sweetness of the love of Allah has made them that way. So they did not engage themselves in anything other than Him.[82]

3. Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) is reported to have said:

مَنْ أَحَبَّنَا بِقَلْبِهِ وَأَعَانَنَا بِلِسَانِهِ وَقاتَلَ مَعَنَا أَعْداءَنَا بِيدِهِ فَهُوَ مَعَنَا فِي الْجَنَّةِ فِي دَرَجَتِنَا. وَمَنْ أَحَبَّنَا بِقَلْبِهِ وَأَعَانَنَا بِلِسَانِهِ وَلَمْ يُقَاتِلْ مَعَنَا أَعْدَاءَنَا فَهُوَ أَسْفَل مِنْ ذَلِكَ بِدَرَجَتَيْنِ، وَمَنْ أَحَبَّنَا بِقَلْبِهِ وَلَمْ يُعِنَّا بِلِسَانِهِ وَلاَ بِيَدِهِ فهو في الجنّة

Whosoever loves us with his heart and assists us with his tongue and fights with us against our enemies, then he is with us in Paradise in our station; and whosoever loves us with his heart, and assists us through his tongue, but does not fight with us against our enemies, then he is two stations lower than that; and whosoever loves us with his heart but does not help us through his tongue, nor with his hand, then he is [merely] in Paradise.[83]

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

It is imperative to know that there is wisdom as to why a specific supplication is given for a specific time. The Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa), the

82 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, p. 130.
83 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, p. 629.

infallible guardians of religion, are fully cognisant about this important point. Invoking these two divine names daily in the holy month of Ramaḍān alludes to the reality that this month is a month of attaining spiritual elevation and greatness. Therefore let us all grab the opportunity at hand, and struggle to soar to the proximity of the Exalted Beloved and get coloured by Him, and how beautiful is His colouring! The Holy Qur'ān says:

صِبْغَةَ اللّٰهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللّٰهِ صِبْغَةً ...

> The colouring of Allah, and who colours more beautiful than Allah... (2:138)

In his Epistle on Whisperings with God, the contemporary mystical scholar, Āyatullāh Ḥasan Zādeh Āmulī says:

الهی، هم نشین از هم نشین رنگ می گیرد، خوشا آن که با تو هم نشین است، (صِبغَةَ اللّٰهِ وَمَن اَحسَنُ مِنَ اللّٰهِ صِبغَه).

> My God, one who accompanies another assumes his colour; delighted be one who shares Your company! (*The colouring of Allah, and who colours more beautiful than Allah!?*)[84]

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

It is noteworthy that we are taught to always call Allah with these two sublime names so many times throughout the day in our daily prayers: The name *'Aẓīm* always comes in the *dhikr* of *rukū'* when we say *Subḥāna Rabbī al-Aẓīmi wa bi-ḥamdihī* (Free from imperfection is my Lord, the Tremendous, and I praise Him) and the name *'Alī* always comes in the *dhikr* of *sujūd* when we say

84 Āyatullāh Ḥasan Zādeh Āmulī, *Ilāhī Nāmeh*, http://www.ghadeer.org [4-11-2013].

Subḥāna Rabbī al-A'lā wa bi-ḥamdihī (Free from imperfection is my Lord, the Most High, and I praise Him).

The insightful scholars believe that those endowed with inner vision behold in the state of *rukū'* the reality that all attributes of perfection solely belong to Allah, and in the state of *sujūd* that there exists only one essence in reality and that is *Allah.*

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous

Invoking the names *al-'Aliyyu* and *al-'Aẓīmu*, as we said earlier, is due to the human being's natural inclination to acquire elevation and greatness. We came to realise that besides supplication, one must also seek the causes of elevation and greatness that the Absolutely Exalted & Tremendous Being has taught us through His Apostles, so that one can achieve elevation and greatness.

Another facility that Allah has availed the human being is the atmosphere of the world of creation. Almighty Allah, after creating the universe, has invited us to reflect on the different things that He has created and thereby travel to His proximity.

The Holy Qur'ān tells us:

وَكَأَيِّن مِّنْ آيَةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُونَ

> And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth which they pass by, yet they turn aside from it. (12:105)

The entire world has been created in such a way that a contemplative person can be transported to loftier levels of reality.

Things like the mountains, the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars and the birds, should serve as points of transformation and ascension.

If we look at them with the Qur'ānic vision of contemplation, we might resolve to journey to our destination of loftiness and sublimity.

It is interesting to note that authorities of dream interpretation from Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa) to the likes of Ibn Sirin have thought-provoking interpretations for entities like the mountain. They unanimously say that it refers to lofty and high matters: Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa), for example, is reported to have said:

رُؤْيَا الْجَبَلِ تَؤَوْلُ بالْـمُلْكِ وَالظَّفْرِ وَالرِّيَاسَةِ وَلِقَاءِ الرَّاحَةِ

> *Seeing a mountain* in a dream is interpreted as kingdom, victory, leadership and meeting comfort.[85]

Therefore when we see any mountain, we should be led to think of how to elevate ourselves and attain the peak of human perfection. Mountains also allude to firmness, and a believer is in some traditions compared to a mountain. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

اَلْمُؤْمِنُ **كَالْجَبَلِ الرَّاسِخِ**، لاَ تُحَرِّكُهُ الْعَوَاصِفُ

> A believer is *like a firm mountain*, which the violent winds cannot shake.

Amīr al-mu'minīn (ʻa) is also reported to have said something interesting in this regard:

ذُو الشَّرَفِ لاَ تُبْطِرُهُ مَنْزِلَةٌ نَالَهَا وَإِنْ عَظُمَتْ **كَالْجَبَلِ الَّذِيْ لاَ تُزَعْزِعُهُ الرِّيَاحُ**، وَالدَّنِيُّ يُبْطِرُهُ أَدْنِى مَنْزِلَةً كَالكَلأِ الَّذِيْ يُحَرِّكُهُ مَرَّ النَّسِيمِ

> A sublime human being does not become proud when attaining any station, even if it be great. *He is like a mountain that winds cannot shake.* The degenerate, however, becomes proud by attaining the lowest of stations, like the grass that the breeze shakes.[86]

85 *Al-Mawsūʻat al-Jāmiʻah fī Tafsīr al-Aḥlām*, p. 151.
86 Al-Wāsiṭī, *ʻUyūn al-Ḥikam wa al-Mawāʻiẓ*, p. 257.

When we behold the sky (*samāʿ*) our minds should remind us of *sumuww* (highness). Just as the sky is high, the human being can attain a level which is high. The Ahl al-Bayt (ʻa) are introduced in some traditions as The lofty sky (*al-samāʼ al-marfūʻah*). Imam al-Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (ʻa) is reported to have said in one of his sermons:

آلُ مُحَمَّدٍ كَالسَّمَاءِ الْمَرْفُوْعَةِ

The progeny of Muḥammad *are like the lofty sky.*[87]

Contemplating upon the stars, the sun, and the moon, should wake us up and teach us the lesson of elevation. We have many traditions that compare sublime human beings with these radiant heavenly bodies. Look at the following traditions:

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

اَنَا كَالشَّمْسِ وَعَلِيٌّ كَالْقَمَرِ وَأَهْلُ بَيْتِيْ كَالنُّجُوْمِ، بِأَيِّهِمْ اِقْتَدَيْتُمْ اِهْتَدَيْتُمْ

I am like the sun, and ʻAlī is like the moon, and my household are like the stars; whichever among them you follow you will attain guidance.[88]

In another tradition, the Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said to Imam ʻAli (ʻa):

يَا عَلِيُّ تَخْرُجُ أَنْتَ وَشِيْعَتُكَ مِنْ قُبُوْرِهِمْ وَوُجُوْهُكُمْ كَالْقَمَرِ لَيْلَةَ الْبَدْرِ

O ʻAli, you and your followers (Shias) will come out from your graves while your faces will be like the *full moon.*[89]

Amīr al-muʼminīn (ʻa) is reported to have said in one of his sermons:

87 Al-Shāhrūdī, *Mustadrak Safīnat al-Biḥār*, v. 5, pp. 361-362.
88 Al-Iḥṣāʼī, *ʻAwāli' al-Laʼālī*, v. 4, p. 86.
89 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʼir al-Darajāt*, p. 104.

وَإِنَّمَا الْعُلَمَاءُ فِي النَّاسِ كَالْبَدْرِ فِي السَّمَاءِ، يُضِيْءُ نُوْرُهُ عَلىَ سَائِرِ الْكَوَاكِبِ

Indeed the knowledgeable ones among the people are like the full moon in the sky, its light radiates over the rest of the stars.[90]

Birds, likewise, must remind us of our journey towards the higher levels of existence. The flying bird reveals so many things for the contemplative mind. One should therefore not be oblivious of all these signs that call the human spirit to wake up and think of elevation.

The vastness of the ocean and the sky likewise make our minds transcend towards the reality of *'aẓamah* and tremendousness. The human being has an infinite journey of tremendousness to undertake. Tremendous entities should therefore shake the human being and remind him of what kind of tremendousness he can attain.

90 Shaykh Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, v. 1, pp. 229-230.

CHAPTER 2

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

A Commentary on the phrase *Yā Ghafūru Yā Raḥīmu*
(O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful)

نَبِّئْ عِبَادِي أَنِّي أَنَا الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Inform my servants that *I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.* (15:49)

... إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

... Indeed Allah forgives all sins. Indeed *He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.* (39:53)

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

As we said earlier, the literal meaning of *ḥamd* (praise) is to manifest the attributes of perfection of the object of praise (*maḥmūd*). Here, while we enumerate another two attributes of Allah and thereby praise Him, we also seek pardon and special mercy from Him. We must also understand that the Forgiver and the Merciful always has the upper hand (*al-yad al-ʿulyā*) and is Exalted. Hence employing the vocative particle ya is also apt as we *call* the *Exalted* Forgiver and Merciful.

يَا غَفُورُ...

O All-Forgiving . . .

The trilateral root of the word *ghafūr*, which is *ghayn*, *fā'*, and *rā'*, literally signifies the act of concealing (*al-satr*) something. Ibn Fāris in his etymological lexicon *Muʿjam*, defining the root of the word *ghafūr*, says:

فَالْغَفْرُ: الستر. والغُفْرَانُ والغَفْرُ: بمعنى

> Thus *al-ghafr* means to hide (*al-satr*); and *al-ghufrān* and *al-ghafr* have the same meaning.[1]

Al-Aẓharī, in his comprehensive Arabic lexicon *Tahdhīb al-Lughah*, mentioning the original meaning of *al-ghafr* says:

أصل الغفر: الستر والتغطية، وَغَفَرَ اللّٰهُ ذُنُوْبَهُ: أي سترها ولم يفضَحه بها على رؤوس الملأ

1 Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, v. 4, p. 385.

> The original meaning of al-ghafr is *al-satr* (to hide) and *al-taghṭiyah* (to cover),[2] and [when we say] *ghafar Allāhu dhunūbahu* it means 'Allah hid his sins and did not defame him through them in front of the masses.'[3]

According to al-Muṣṭafawī, however, the root meaning of *al-ghafr* is *maḥw al-athar* (to efface the trace). He believes that other meanings attributed to it such *al-satr* (to hide) or *al-taghṭiyah* (covering), etc. are the corollaries of *maḥw al-athar* (to efface the trace).[4]

In light of the aforesaid, we say that Almighty Allah is *al-Ghafūr*, because He effaces and covers the sins of the sinful.

In order to know the nature of how He effaces the sins, let us look at an interesting *ḥadīth* narrated by Shaykh al-Kulaynī in his *al-Kāfī*:

> عَنْ مُعَاوِيَةَ بْنِ وَهْبٍ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع) يَقُولُ: إِذَا تَابَ الْعَبْدُ تَوْبَةً نَصُوحاً أَحَبَّهُ اللهُ فَسَتَرَ عَلَيْهِ، فَقُلْتُ: وَكَيْفَ يَسْتُرُ عَلَيْهِ؟ قَالَ: يُنْسِي مَلَكَيْهِ مَا كَانَا يَكْتُبَانِ عَلَيْهِ وَيُوحِي اللهُ إِلَى جَوَارِحِهِ وَإِلَى بِقَاعِ الْأَرْضِ أَنِ اكْتُمِي عَلَيْهِ ذُنُوبَهُ فَيَلْقَى اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ حِينَ يَلْقَاهُ وَلَيْسَ شَيْءٌ يَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ

> Muʿāwiyah ibn Wahb is reported to have said: I heard Abū ʿAbdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (ʿa) saying: When a servant [of Allah] returns in penitence with sincere repentance Allah loves him and thus covers him. I asked [the Imam (ʿa)]: And how does He cover him? He said: He makes his two angels [the recorders of deeds] forget what

2 Al-Jawharī in his *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ* also has a similar definition: Ref: Al-Jawhari, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, v. 2, p. 770.

3 Al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-Lughah*, v. 8, p. 112.

4 Al-Muṣṭafawī, *al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, v. 7, p. 293.

> they would write against him, and Allah will inspire the members of his body and the places of the earth [informing them that]: hide his sins! Hence he would meet Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, when he meets Him, in a state whereby there is nothing that bears witness against him with any of the sins.[5]

يَا غَفُورُ...

O All-Forgiving . . .

When discussing the difference between *al-ghufrān* and *al-satr*, Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī in his *al-Furūq* says:

الغفران أخص وهو يقتضي إيجاب الثواب

> *Al-ghufrān* (to forgive and cover) is more specific [than *al-satr*], and it necessitates reward.[6]

Considering this subtlety, when we say *Yā Ghafūru* we are seeking more than the effacement of our sins.

يَا غَفُورُ...

O All-Forgiving . . .

The word *ghafūr* is also in the linguistic form of *fa'ūl* which is a hyperbolic form (*ṣīghah mubālaghah*) and hence it signifies abundance. Therefore '*Yā Ghafūru*' literally means 'O One who abundantly forgives'. It is also an assimilate epithet (*ṣifah mushbihah*) which signifies perpetuity and continuity, and hence it means 'O One who always forgives abundantly'. There is another connotation that the linguistic form *fa'ūl* also signifies,

5 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v.2, p. 436.
6 Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *al-Furūq fī al-Lughah*, p. 230.

and that is excellence, perfection and inclusiveness. Hence, the word *ghafūru* would mean 'One who always forgives completely and perfectly'.[7]

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

The word *raḥīm* comes from the infinitive *raḥmah* which means mercy. *Raḥīm* therefore means 'the merciful'. And because it is both a hyperbolic form (*ṣīghah mubālaghah*) and an assimilate epithet (*ṣifah mushbihah*), it signifies abundant and perpetual mercy. The mercy that the divine name *Raḥīm* signifies is also introduced in some of our *ḥadīths* as special divine mercy which only the believers enjoy. This mercy is related to matters such as faith and conviction, guidance, perfection, paradise, etc. It must be known, however, that Almighty Allah spreads His specific mercy to all, but the unbelievers hamper themselves from enjoying the same due to their own limitations.

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

Al-Ghafūr is a divine name that comes under the divine name *al-Raḥīm*, for the former is only one of the extensions (*maṣādīq*) of the latter. In simpler words, one of the examples of Allah's special mercy is that He is *al-Ghafūr* (the Coverer of sins). Hence, the reason for bringing *al-Raḥīm* is perhaps to seek more than just covering the sin and protecting the sinful servant from punishment. Perhaps it alludes to the removal of worry of the effects of sin as some scholars have alluded. It can also refer to changing sins into good deeds (*tabdīl al-sayyi'āt ilā al-ḥasanāt*).

7 Sayyid 'Alī Khān al-Madanī, *Riyāḍ al-Sālikīn*, v. 4, p. 144.

Consider the following noteworthy anecdote:

إِنَّ جَبْرَئِيْلَ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ) سَمِعَ إِبْرَاهِيْمَ خَلِيْلَ الرَّحْمنِ صَلَوَاتُ اللهِ عَلَيْهِ يَقُوْلُ: يَا كَرِيْمَ الْعَفْوِ، فَقَالَ لَهُ: أَوَ تَدْرِيْ يَا إِبْرَاهِيْمُ مَا كَرَمُ عَفْوِهِ؟ قَالَ: لاَ يَا جَبْرَئِيْلُ، قَالَ: إِنْ عَفَا عَنِ السَّيِّئَةِ كَتَبَهَا حَسَنَةً

It is narrated that Jibra'īl ('a) heard Ibrāhīm, the friend of the All-Beneficent, saying: O Noble Pardoner (*Yā Karīm al-'Afw*). So he said to him: And do you know, O Ibrāhīm, what is the meaning of the nobility of His pardon? He ('a) said: No, O Jibra'īl. Jibra'īl said: It means that if He pardons a misdeed, He writes it as a good deed.[8]

The Holy Qur'ān alluding to this says:

إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَـٰئِكَ **يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ** ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

Excepting those who repent, attain faith, and act righteously. For such, *Allah will replace their misdeeds with good deeds*, and Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. (25:70)

يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَظِيمُ
يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Exalted, O Tremendous,
O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

Seeking pardon and special divine mercy are the foundational stages of attaining elevation (*'uluww*) and greatness (*'aẓamah*).

8 *Ibid.*, v.1, p. 329.

This is because one of the rudimentary levels of the spiritual journey to Allah, the insightful scholars believe, is *al-takhliyah*, which is to remove the dirt and taint of sin one has accumulated in one's heart, before one can embellish oneself with divine attributes, which is technically known as *al-taḥliyah* (self-beautification).

Briefly, the fundamental steps of spiritual progress according to the insightful scholars are as follows:

1) *Al-Tajliyah* (Strictly adhering to the apparent Islamic laws and refraining from whatever Islam has prohibited)

2) *Al-Takhliyah* (Cleaning oneself through the water of repentance and *tawbah*)

3) *Al-Taḥliyah* (Beautifying oneself with the perfections of the Absolutely Beautiful according to one's capacity)

4) *Al-Fanā'* (Dissolution in the Beloved, such that one visions that no identity exists save Allah)

Hence, by seeking forgiveness from Allah the sinful human being is clearing his heart so that he can beautify it with divine attributes.

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

Invoking these divine names in this holy month alludes to the fact that it is a month of forgiveness and special divine mercy. In fact one who is deprived of divine forgiveness in this holy month is termed as *shaqī* (wretched) in some traditions. In the well-known sermon preceding the holy month of Ramadan the Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

فَإِنَّ الشَّقِيَّ مَنْ حُرِمَ غُفْرَانَ اللهِ فِي هَذَا الشَّهْرِ الْعَظِيم

For indeed the wretched is he who is deprived of Allah's forgiveness in this great month.[9]

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

Invoking the divine names of forgiveness and mercy requires one to seek the causes that enable one to attract divine forgiveness and specific mercy. Otherwise our invocation would be the mere movement of our tongues. The following are some of the many causes that the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have prescribed for the repentant ones:

1. Supplication:

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

مَنْ قَالَ حِيْنَ يَأْخُذُ مَضْجِعَهُ ثَلاَثَ مَرَّاتٍ: «اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الَّذِيْ عَلاَ فَقَهَرَ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الَّذِيْ بَطَنَ فَخَبَرَ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الَّذِيْ مَلَكَ فَقَدَرَ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الَّذِيْ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى وَيُمِيْتُ الأَحْيَاءَ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٍ» **خَرَجَ مِنَ الذُّنُوْبِ كَهَيْئَةِ يَوْم وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ**

Whosoever says the following three times when he retires to his bed: 'Praise belongs to Allah, who is High and hence Dominant, and praise belongs to Allah who is Hidden and hence knows thoroughly, and praise belongs to Allah who owns and hence has power, and praise belongs to Allah who revives the dead and confers death to the living ones, and He is Powerful over everything' *would leave his sins like the day when his mother gave him birth.*[10]

9 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 93.

10 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, p. 535.

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

> مَا مِنْ عَبْدٍ يَصُوْمُ فَيَقُوْلُ عِنْدَ إِفْطَارِهِ: «يَا عَظِيْمُ يَا عَظِيْمُ، أَنْتَ اِلَهِيْ لاَ إِلَهَ لِيْ غَيْرُكَ اِغْفِرْ لِيَ الذَّنْبَ الْعَظِيْمَ إِنَّهُ لاَ يَغْفِرُ الذَّنْبَ الْعَظِيْمَ إِلاَّ الْعَظِيْمُ» **إِلاَّ خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوْبِهِ كَيَوْمٍ وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ**
>
> No servant of Allah fasts, and then says at the time of his iftar: '*Yā 'Aẓīmu Yā 'Aẓīmu, anta ilāhī lā ilāha lī ghayruk ighfir lī al-dhanb al-'aẓīma, innahu lā yaghfiru al-dhanba al-'aẓīma illa al-'Aẓīmu* (O Tremendous, O Tremendous, You are my God, I have no God other than You, Forgive for me the tremendous sin. Indeed none forgives the tremendous sin save the Tremendous One)' *except that he leaves his sins like the day when his mother gave him birth.*[11]

2. Washing the dead:

Imam al-Bāqir ('a) is reported to have said:

> كَانَ فِيْمَا نَاجَى اللهَ بِهِ مُوْسَى قَالَ: يَا رَبِّ مَا لِمَنْ غَسَلَ الْمَوْتَى؟ فَقَالَ: أُغَسِّلُهُ مِنْ ذُنُوْبِهِ كَمَا وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ
>
> Among those things that Mūsā whispered to Allah was the following: O Lord, what reward is there for one who washes [the body of] the dead? Allah said: I would wash him from his sins, such that he is like when his mother gave him birth.[12]

3. Performing Hajj:

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

> اَلْحُجَّاجُ يَصْدُرُوْنَ عَلىَ ثَلاَثَةِ أَصْنَافٍ صِنْفٌ يُعْتَقُ مِنَ النَّارِ **وَصِنْفٌ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ ذُنُوْبِهِ كَهَيْئَةِ يَوْمٍ** وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَصِنْفٌ يُحْفَظُ فِيْ أَهْلِهِ وَمَالِهِ، فَذَاكَ أَدْنَى مَا يَرْجِعُ بِهِ الْحَاجُّ

11 Sayyid Raḍī al-Dīn ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl al-A'māl*, v. 1, p. 24.

12 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 3, p. 164.

The *ḥujjāj* leave in three categories: one category is that which is emancipated from Hell-Fire; another *category is that which leave their sins like the day their mothers gave them birth*; and another category is that whose family and wealth are safe; and that is the least that the pilgrim returns with.[13]

4. Ziyarah of Imam al-Riḍā (ʻa):

Imam al-Riḍā (ʻa) is reported to have said to a group of people from Qum:

مَرْحَبًا بِكُمْ وَأَهْلاً فَأَنْتُمْ شِيْعَتُنَا حَقًّا، وَسَيَأْتِيْ عَلَيْكُمْ يَوْمٌ تَزُوْرُوْنِيْ فِيْهِ تُرْبَتِيْ بِطُوْس، أَلاَ فَمَنْ زَارَنِيْ وَهُوَ عَلىَ غُسْلٍ **خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوْبِهِ كَيَوْمٍ وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ**

Welcome, for you are truly our Shias, and you will experience a day when you will visit me in my burial place in Ṭūs. Indeed whosoever visits me in the state of having performed the major ablution (*ghusl*), *would come out of his sins like the day his mother gave him birth.*[14]

5. *Ghusl* on specific nights of the month of Ramaḍān:

Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa) is reported to have said:

مَنْ اِغْتَسَلَ لَيَالِي الْغُسْلِ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَان خَرَجَ مِنْ ذُنُوْبِهِ كَهَيْئَةِ يَوْم وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ فَقُلْتُ: يَا بْنَ رَسُوْلِ اللهِ (ص) مَا لَيَالِي الْغُسْلِ؟ قَالَ: لَيْلَةُ سَبْعَ عَشَرَة وَلَيْلَة تِسْعَ عَشَرَة وَلَيْلَة إِحْدَى وَعِشْرِيْنَ وَلَيْلَةُ ثَلاَث وَعِشْرِيْنَ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَان

Whosoever performs the major ablution (*ghusl*) on the nights of *ghusl* of the holy month of Ramaḍān, would leave his sins and come into a state like the day when his mother gave him birth. So I asked: O son of the Apostle of Allah (ṣ), what are the nights of *ghusl*? He said: the night of the seventeenth, nineteenth,

13 *Ibid.*, v. 4, p. 253.

14 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʻUyun Akhbār al-Riḍā (ʻa)*, v. 1, p. 291.

twenty-first, and twenty-third of the month of Ramaḍān.[15]

6. Ṣiyām (Fasting):

The following is a tradition from Imam al-Bāqir (ʻa) worthy of consideration:

عَنْ جَابِر اَنَّ أَبَا جَعْفَر عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ قَالَ لَهُ: يَا جَابِرُ، مَنْ دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ فَصَامَ نَهَارَهُ، وَقَامَ وِرْدًا مِنْ لَيْلِهِ، وَحَفِظَ فَرْجَهُ وَلِسَانَهُ، وَغَضَّ بَصَرَهُ، وَكَفَّ أَذَاهُ، خَرَجَ مِنَ الذُّنُوْبِ كَيَوْمٍ وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ، قَالَ جَابِر: قُلْتُ لَهُ: جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ، مَا أَحْسَنَ هَذَا مِنْ حَدِيْثٍ! قَالَ: مَا أَشَدُّ هَذَا مِنْ شَرْطٍ!

Jābir is reported to have said: Abū Jaʻfar [al-Bāqir] said to him: O Jābir, whosoever experiences the month of Ramaḍān, and fasts during its days and stands in remembrance of Allah during the night and protects his private parts and his tongue, and lowers his eyes [from the unlawful], and restrains from disturbing others, comes out from his sins like the day when his mother gave him birth. Thereupon Jābir said: I said to the Imam: May I be made your ransom, how beautiful is this tradition! The Imam (ʻa) said: And how difficult are the conditions [to attain such forgiveness]![16]

7. Ṣalāt (Prayer):

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

إِذَا قَامَ الْعَبْدُ لِلصَّلاَةِ، فَكَانَ هَوَاهُ وَقَلْبُهُ إِلَى اللهِ تَعَالَى، **اِنْصَرَفَ كَيَوْمٍ وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ**

When a servant of Allah stands for prayer, and his desire and heart is towards Allah, the Exalted, *he would finish his prayer [and he would be] like the day his*

15 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍā'il al-Ashhur al-Thalāthah*, pp. 137-138.

16 Al-ʻĀmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shīʻah*, v. 10, pp. 303-304.

mother gave him birth.[17]

8. Love for Imam 'Alī ('a):

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

حُبُّ عَلِيٍّ يَأْكُلُ الذُّنُوْبَ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ النّارُ الْحَطَبَ

> Love for 'Ali ('a) consumes the sins the way fire consumes firewood.[18]

9. Helping the troubled:

Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

مِنْ كَفَّارَةِ الذُّنُوْبِ الْعِظَامِ: إِغَاثَةُ الْمَلْهُوْفِ، وَالتَّنَفُّسُ عَنِ الْمَكْرُوْبِ

> *Among those things that expiate tremendous sins are*: helping the troubled, and comforting the anguished one.[19]

10. Sujūd (Prostration before Allah):

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلىَ رَسُوْلِ اللهِ (ص) فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُوْلَ اللهِ (ص) كَثُرَتْ ذُنُوْبِيْ وَضَعُفَ عَمَلِيْ، فَقَالَ رَسُوْلُ اللهِ (ص): أَكْثِرِ السُّجُوْدَ **فَإِنَّهُ يَحُطُّ الذُّنُوْبَ كَمَا تَحُطُّ الرِّيْحُ وَرَقَ الشَّجَرِ**

> A man came to the Apostle of Allah (ṣ) and said: O Apostle of Allah, my sins have increased and my action is weak. Thereupon the Apostle of Allah said: Frequent prostration, *for surely it fells off the sins the way the wind fells the leaves off the tree.*[20]

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17 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v. 3, p. 59.
18 Rayshahrī, *Mīzān al-Ḥikmah*, v. 1, p. 136.
19 *Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 1001.
20 *Ibid.*

11. Ṣalawāt (Invoking Allah's abundant mercy on Muḥammad and his household):

Imam al-Riḍā (ʻa) is reported to have said:

مَنْ لَمْ يَقْدِرْ عَلىَ مَا يُكَفِّرُ بِهِ ذُنُوْبَهُ فَلْيُكْثِرْ مِنَ الصَّلَوَاتِ عَلىَ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ **فَإِنَّهَا تَهْدِمُ الذُّنُوْبَ هَدْمًا**

> Whosoever is unable to do what expiates his sins must invoke blessings on Muḥammad and his progeny abundantly, *for surely it thoroughly destroys the sins.*[21]

12. Ḥasanāt (Beautiful deeds):

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

إِذَا عَمِلْتَ سَيِّئَةً **فَاعْمَلْ حَسَنَةً تَمْحُوْهَا**

> If you do a bad deed, then *do a good deed and you shall erase the bad deed.*[22]

13. Muṣāfaḥah (Shaking hands):

Imam al-Bāqir (ʻa) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَيْنِ إِذَا الْتَقَيَا فَتَصَافَحَا أَدْخَلَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يَدَهُ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمَا وَأَقْبَلَ بِوَجْهِهِ عَلىَ أَشَدِّهِمَا حُبًّا لِصَاحِبِهِ، فَإِذَا أَقْبَلَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ بِوَجْهِهِ عَلَيْهِمَا **تَحَاتَتْ عَنْهُمَا الذُّنُوْبُ كَمَا يَتَحَاتَ الْوَرَقُ مِنَ الشَّجَرِ**

> Indeed when two believers meet and shake hands with one another, Allah places his hand between them, and inclines towards the one whose love for his companion is more intense; and when Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, inclines towards both of them, *their sins fall off from them, the way leaves fall off from the tree.*[23]

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21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*, p. 1000.

23 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, pp. 179-180.

14. Istighfār (Seeking forgiveness):

Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) is reported to have said:

مَنْ اِسْتَغْفَرَ اللهَ مِائَةَ مَرَّة حِيْنَ ينامُ بَاتَ **وَقَدْ تَحَاتَتْ عَنْهُ الذُّنُوْبُ كُلُّهَا** كَمَا يَتَحَاتَ الْوَرَقُ مِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَيَصْبَحُ وَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ ذَنْبٌ

Whosoever seeks forgiveness from Allah a hundred times before sleeping, *would spend his night while all his sins would have fallen from him*, the way leaves fall from the tree, and he would wake up while he has no sin upon him.[24]

The Importance of Seeking Forgiveness at Pre-dawn

The Holy Qur’ān and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) highly emphasise that one should seek forgiveness during the *saḥar* (pre-dawn) moments of every night. Enumerating the characteristics of the God-wary (*muttaqūn*), Almighty Allah says:

الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْمُنفِقِينَ **وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ**

The patient, and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend (benevolently) *and those who ask forgiveness at the pre-dawn times.* (3:17)

وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

And at pre-dawn times they seek forgiveness. (51:18)

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

خَيْرُ وَقْتٍ دَعَوْتُمُ اللهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فِيْهِ الأَسْحَارُ، وَتَلاَ هَذِهِ الآيَةُ فِيْ قَوْلِ يَعْقُوْب (عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ): **سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّيْ قَالَ: أَخَّرَهُمْ إِلىَ السَّحَرِ**

The best time in which you can call Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, is at pre-dawn. Thereafter he read the following verse about the statement of

24 Al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah*, v. 4, p. 1029.

Ya'qūb ('a): *I shall soon seek forgiveness for you from my Lord. He then said: Prophet Ya'qūb delayed them until pre-dawn.*[25]

The following are narratives worthy of reflection:

وَرُوِيَ أَنْ دَاوُد (عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ)، سَأَلَ جَبْرَئِيْلَ عَنْ أَفْضَلِ الأَوْقَاتِ، قَالَ: لاَ أَعْلَمُ، **إِلاَّ أَنَّ الْعَرْشَ يَهْتَزُّ فِي الأَسْحَارِ**

It is narrated that Prophet Dāwūd ('a) asked Jibra'īl ('a) about the best of times. He said: *I do not know, except that the Divine Throne shakes during the pre-dawn times.*[26]

وَفِيْ وَصَايَا لُقْمَان لاِبْنِهِ: يَا بُنَيَّ، لاَ يَكُوْنُ الدِّيْكُ أَكْيَس مِنْكَ، **يَقُوْمُ فِيْ وَقْتِ السَّحَرِ وَيَسْتَغْفِر**، وَأَنْتَ نَائِمٌ

And from among the counsels of Luqmān to his son is: O my dear little son, let not the cockerel be cleverer than you; *it rises at the pre-dawn time and seeks forgiveness while you are asleep.*[27]

15. Ziyārah of Imam al-Ḥusayn ('a):

Mu'ammar reports: I heard Zayd ibn 'Alī ('a) saying:

مَنْ زَارَ قَبْرَ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ) لاَ يُرِيْدُ بِهِ إِلاَّ اللهَ تَعَالَى **غُفِرَ لَهُ جَمِيْعُ ذُنُوْبِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَتْ مِثْلَ زَبَدِ الْبَحْرِ**، فَاسْتَكْثِرُوْا مِنْ زِيَارَتِهِ يَغْفِرُ اللهُ لَكُمْ ذُنُوْبَكُمْ

Whosoever visits the grave of al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ('a) and by that he does not desire save Allah, the Exalted, *all his sins would be forgiven, even if they would be like the foam of the sea*; therefore frequent in visiting him,

25 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, p. 477.
26 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v. 12, p. 146.
27 *Ibid.*

and Allah will forgive you your sins.[28]

16. Lawful copulation between a believer and his believing wife:

The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

إِذَا أَقْبَلَ الرَّجُلُ الْمُؤْمِنُ عَلَى اِمْرَأَتِهِ الْمُؤْمِنَةِ، اِكْتَنَفَهُ مَلَكَانِ، وَكَانَ كَالشَّاهِرِ سَيْفَهُ فِيْ سَبِيْلِ اللهِ، **فَإِذَا فَرِغَ مِنْهَا تَحَاتَتْ عَنْهُ الذُّنُوْبُ، كَمَا يَتَحَاتَ وَرَقُ الشَّجَرِ أَوَانَّ سُقُوْطِهُ**، فَإِذَا هُوَ اغْتَسَلَ اِنْسَلَخَ مِنَ الذُّنُوْبِ، فَقَالَتْ اِمْرَأَةٌ: بَأَبِيْ أَنْتَ وَأُمِّيْ يَا رَسُوْلَ اللهِ، هَذَا لِلرِّجَالِ، فَمَا لِلنِّسَاءِ؟ قَالَ: إِذَا هِيَ حَمَلَتْ كَتَبَ اللهُ لَهَا أَجْرَ الصَّائِمِ الْقَائِمِ، فَإِذَا أَخَذَهَا الطلق لَمْ يَدْرِ مَا لَهَا مِنَ الأَجْرِ إِلاَّ اللهَ، فَإِذَا وَضَعَتْ كَتَبَ اللهُ لَهَا بِكُلِّ مَصّةٍ يَعْنِيْ مِنَ الرِّضَاعِ حَسَنَةً، وَمَحَا عَنْهَا سِيِّئَةً.

When a believing man approaches his believing wife, two angels surround him and he is like one who unsheathes his sword in the way of Allah, and when he finishes his engagement with her, *his sins fall off from him the way the leaves of a tree fall off during the autumn*, and when he performs the ablution (*ghusl*), he is removed from his sins. [Thereupon a woman who was hearing the Prophet's words said:] May my father and mother be your ransom, O Apostle of Allah, all this that you said is for men. What is there for the woman? He ('a) said: If she gets pregnant Allah records for her the reward of the one who fasts and stands in prayer, when she experiences her labour pain, other than Allah no one knows what reward there is for her. And when she delivers, Allah writes for her a good deed and erases a bad deed every time the baby suckles when feeding.[29]

28 Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 275.

29 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v. 14, pp. 151-152.

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

By invoking the names *al-Ghafūru* and *al-Raḥīmu*, we seek divine forgiveness and mercy. We must remember, however, that *ghufrān* and *raḥmah* are of different levels. Narrations reveal that the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʻa) would also seek forgiveness. Their *istighfār* however cannot be compared to ours. They neither committed major nor minor sins. They would also refrain from acts classified as abhorred (makrūh). Furthermore, they would adhere not only to the obligatory acts, but even to the supererogatory acts. Then what is the meaning of their *istighfār* and their seeking forgiveness?

Scholars of insight inform us that although it was essential for the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and his infallible progeny (ʻa) to pay attention to the world and perform their divine duties of guiding the people, it would create a kind of discomfort and turbidity in them. They would seek forgiveness because of not having been able to be totally absorbed in Allah whilst attending to the world.

The late Imam Khumayni alludes to this in one of his sermons:

> Right from the Holy Prophet (ṣ) until the Imam of the time (ʻaj) all were afraid of sinning. Their sin was not what you and I possess. They comprehended such greatness that paying attention to the world of plurality was deemed as a major sin to them.[30]

The Comprehensive Spirit of the Imam (ʻa)

Some insightful scholars explain that many of the supplications of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʻa) are in reality due to the fact that they behold the sins of their nations as their own sins. They have

30 Āyatullāh Khumayni, *Chehel Ḥadīth*, p. 342.

united with the spirits of their nations, and hence tangibly sense the agony and pain due to what their nations have committed. It is because of this very situation that you find them speaking of the different sins, which obviously is far from their exalted station of infallibility. Explaining this reality, Āyatullāh Saʿādat Parwar in his masterpiece *Nūr-e Hidāyat*, says:

> Imam (ʿa) considers himself as the nation of his time, and the nation of his time as himself, and he also considers their conversations as his conversations. In other words, he considers the ummah to be his own spirit; and that is why he utters such expressions [of admitting to sins].[31]

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

While we recite *Yā Ghafūru Yā Raḥīmu* and anticipate self-purification in order to be able to receive divine grace, we must also assimilate this attribute and forgive those who have done wrong to us. If we remind ourselves that the fundamental aim of our lives is to manifest Allah's attributes, we would be convinced that the only right thing to do is to forgive those human beings who have done wrong to us, unless, however, they are antagonists of truth and have lost their aptitude to change and transform themselves. In the Holy Qur'an the expression, '*...fa hum lā yarjiʿūn*' (...and they shall not return (2:18)) is employed for them.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) reminds us of the reality of assimilation in a very beautiful manner. He is reported to have said in a lengthy counsel to his companion, ʿAbdullāh ibn Jundab:

31 Āyatullāh ʿAlī Saʿādat Parwar, *Nūr-e Hidāyat*, pp. 114-115.

أُعْفُ عَمَّنْ ظَلَمَكَ كَمَا أَنَّكَ تُحِبُّ أَنْ يُعْفَى عَنْكَ، فَاعْتَبِرْ بِعَفْوِ اللهِ عَنْكَ

> Forgive one who oppresses you the way you love to be forgiven, and take a lesson from Allah's forgiveness to you.[32]

يَا غَفُورُ يَا رَحِيمُ

O All-Forgiving, O All-Merciful

When we are taught to invoke these beautiful names in this supplication, we are taught the culture of having hope in Allah. Only one who has hope of being forgiven will call Allah with the divine names *Yā Ghafūru Yā Raḥīmu.* Despair, therefore, must never overtake us. The Holy Qur'an says:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ **إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ**

> Say [that Allah declares,] 'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins. *Indeed He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.*' (39:53)

The language of this verse deserves meticulous reflection. The usage of '*ya 'ibādī* (O My servants)', the clause '*Indeed Allah forgives all sins*' and the clause '*Indeed He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful*' with their grammatical subtleties of emphasis and perpetuity leave no room for even thinking of despair. This is one verse where the language of divine love can be tangibly felt.

This transports us to the well-known quatrain of Abū Sa'īd Abū al-Khayr (d. 440/1048) when he says the following:

32 Ibn Shu'bah al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, p. 305.

بـازآ بـازآ هرآنچه هسـتی بازآ * گـر کافر و گبر و بـت‌پرستی بـازآ
ین درگه ما درگه نا امیدی نیسـت * صـد بار اگـر توبه شکستی بـازآ

Come again, come again, whoever you are, come again!
Even if you are a disbeliever, fire-worshipper or idol-worshipper, come!
This portal of ours is not that of despair
Even if you break your penitence a hundred times, come again![33]

In this beautiful quatrain, Abū Sa'īd paints a beautiful picture of divine mercy and forgiveness. As long as the human being truly comes to Allah penitently, He will not discard him but forgive him. Therefore as we say *Yā Ghafūru Yā Raḥīmu* we must not allow the least kind of despair into our hearts.

The following is an interesting anecdote narrated from volume two of the book *Zubdat al-Qiṣas*:

إِنَّ النَّبِيّ مُوْسَى عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ نَادَى رَبَّهُ ذَاتَ يَوْمٍ فِيْ مُنَاجَاتِهِ مِنْ فَوْقِ جَبَلِ الطُّوْرِ: يَا إِلَه الْعَالَمِيْنَ، فَجَاءَهُ الْجَوَابُ: لَبَّيْك. ثُمَّ قَال: يَا إِلَه الْمُطِيْعِيْنَ، فَجَاءَهُ الْجَوَابُ: لَبَّيْك. ثُمَّ قَال: يَا إِلَه الْعَاصِيْن، فَجَاءَهُ الْجَوَابُ: لَبَّيْك لَبَّيْك لَبَّيْك. فَقَال مُوْسَى عَلَى نَبِيّنَا وَعَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ: إِلَهِيْ مَا الْحِكْمَةُ أَنَّنِيْ عِنْدَمَا دَعَوْتُكَ بِأَحْسَنِ أَسْمَائِكَ أَجَبْتَنِيْ مَرَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَمَّا قُلْتُ: يَا إِلَه الْعَاصِيْن أَجَبْتَنِيْ ثَلاَثَ مَرَّاتٍ. فَجَاءَهُ الْجَوَابُ : يَا مُوْسَى إِنَّ الْعَارِفِيْنَ يَعُوْلُوْنَ عَلَىَ مَعْرِفَتِهِمْ وَالْمُحْسِنِيْنَ عَلىَ إِحْسَانِهِمْ، وَالْمُطِيْعِيْنَ عَلىَ طَاعَتِهِمْ، لَكِنَّ الْعَاصِيْنَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ سِوَايَ، فَإِنْ يَئِسُوْا مِنِّيْ فَبِمَنْ يَلُوْذُوْنَ؟

Once Prophet Mūsā ('a) called upon his Lord on Mount Sinai, 'O God of the universe!' And Allah responded, '*Labbayk* (Here I am).' Mūsā ('a) continued and called, 'O God of the obedient ones!' and Allah responded, '*Labbayk* (Here I am).' Then Mūsā ('a) said, 'O God of the sinners!' Upon this Allah said: '*Labbayk*, *Labbayk*,

33 Abū Sa'īd Abū al-Khayr, *Rubā'iyyāt-e Abū Sa'īd Abū al-Khayr.*

Labbayk!' So Mūsā asked Allah, 'O God, what is the wisdom behind responding to me only once when I called you with the best of Your names, and thrice when I said "O God of the sinners?"' Allah said: 'O Mūsā, surely the knowing ones rely on their recognition, the virtuous upon their virtue, and the obedient upon their obedience. But the sinful have none save Me. So if they despair from Me, with whom can they take refuge?'[34]

34 *Qaṣaṣ al-Tawwābīn*, p. 198.

CHAPTER 3

أَنْتَ الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ

A Commentary on the phrase *Anta al-Rabbu al-Aẓīmu*
(You are the Tremendous Lord)

فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ

So celebrate the name of *your Lord,*
the Tremendous. (15:49)

أَنْتَ الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ

You alone are the Tremendous Lord

The definite article *al* that precedes the predicate *Rabb* in the sentence above signifies that the predicate (*khabar*) is exclusively for the subject (*mubtada'*). In simple words, by saying '*Anta al-Rabb al-Aẓīm*' we are trying to say that 'You alone are the Tremendous Lord'.

أَنْتَ الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ

You are the Tremendous Lord

This verse reveals two important things:
(1) Allah is the *Rabb*, which lexically is defined as *al-Mālik al-Mudabbir* (the Owner and the Manager).[1] And since Allah is proven to be the Creator (*al-Khāliq*) of everything (Holy Qur'ān 6:102) only He can be their *Rabb*. This is because only a creator can existentially own and manage his creation, for the real meaning of creation is the continual bestowal of the grace of existence. Contrary to the view of a misled group of deviant human beings who conjectured that a created entity can subsist without its creator, every created entity is actually created every moment anew, and hence is always and perpetually in need of its creator. The example of continual creation cited by the Qur'ān is worthy of mention here:

وَتَرَى الْجِبَالَ تَحْسَبُهَا جَامِدَةً وَهِيَ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ السَّحَابِ . . .

1 Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, v. 2, p. 381; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, v. 1, p. 399; Ibn Durayd, *Jumhurat al-Lughah*, v. 1, p. 67; Al-Aẓharī, *Tahdhīb al-Lughah*, v. 15, p. 128; Ibn Athīr, *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth wa al-Athar*, v. 2, p. 179.

And you see the mountains, which you suppose to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds… (27:88)

(2) He is *al-Rabb al-Aẓīm* (the Tremendous Lord). It must be noted that His tremendousness has no limits and bounds. Hence He is the Most Tremendous. In the well-known supplication of *al-Jawshan al-Kabīr* we say:

يَا أَعْظَمَ مِنْ كُلِّ عَظِيْمٍ

O More Tremendous than every tremendous one.

الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ

The Tremendous Lord

Perhaps the reason why *al-Rabb* was qualified with the adjective *al-ʿAẓīm* was to express the fact that Allah's *Rubūbiyyah* (Lordship) covers everything. The Holy Qur'ān says:

وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ

… His sovereignty extends the heavens and the earth… (2:255)

The phrase '*al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ*' actually alludes to the entire realm of creation.

الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ

The Tremendous Lord

Some lexicographers like al-Iṣfahānī have translated the word *rabb* to mean trainer. In his well-known Qur'ānic lexicon called *Mufradāt Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān*, he says:

الرَّبُّ في الأصل: التربية، وهو إنشاء الشيء حالا فحالا إلى حدّ التمام

> The origin of *al-Rabb* is *al-tarbiyah* and that is to bring about something in gradual states until its level of completion.[2]

Another reason why *al-Rabb* is qualified with the adjective *al-ʿAẓīm* can be to reveal the fact that He is a Lord who trains to make people *ʿaẓīm* and great. In other words all His laws and commandments are for rendering the human being great and honourable.

أَنْتَ الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ

You are the Tremendous Lord

This is a confession on the part of the supplicant, and a confession follows knowledge. The insightful scholars not only mentally and conceptually understand that He alone is the Tremendous Lord, they actually behold and vision the same. The fundamental purpose of creation is to know the Lord (*maʿrifat al-Rabb*). This can be established by the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān:

> اللهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّـهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا
>
> It is Allah who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them, that you may know that Allah has power over all things, and that Allah comprehends all things in knowledge. (65:12)

This verse clearly informs us that the purpose of creating the heavens and the earth is to realise the absolute knowledge and power of Allah, which actually alludes to divine lordship. Only the absolutely knowledgeable and powerful creates, owns and controls

2 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradātu Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān*, v. 1, p. 336.

every being. Therefore, human struggle too should be aimed at the knowledge of divine lordship. And the fundamental key towards the knowledge of divine lordship is self-knowledge.

Consider the following noteworthy traditions:
a) The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

أَعْرَفُكُمْ بِنَفْسِهِ أَعْرَفُكُمْ بِرَبِّهِ

> The most knowledgeable about himself from among you, has the most knowledge of his Lord.[3]

b) The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه

> Whosoever comes to know himself, has known his Lord.[4]

This *ḥadīth* alludes to an important subtlety: one who struggles to know oneself will only achieve his ambition after having known his Lord. In other words, self-knowledge is only realised through the knowledge of the Lord.

c) Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

أُطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصِّيْنِ، وَهُوَ عِلْمُ مَعْرِفَةِ النَّفْسِ وَفِيْهِ مَعْرِفَةُ الرَّبِّ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ

> Seek knowledge even in China, and that is the knowledge of the gnosis of the self; and in it is the gnosis of the Lord, the Invincible and Majestic.[5]

d) Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

غَايَةُ الْمَعْرِفَةِ أَنْ يَعْرِفَ الْمَرْءُ نَفْسَهُ

> The ultimate recognition is man's recognition of his soul.[6]

3 Al-Nīsābūrī, *Rawḍat al-Wā'iẓīn*, p. 20.
4 Al-Iḥṣā'ī, *'Awāli al-La'ālī*, v. 4, p. 102.
5 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 2, p. 32.
6 Al-Wāsiṭī, *'Uyūn al-Ḥikam wa al-Mawā'iẓ*, p. 348.

e) Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

عَجِبْتُ لِمَنْ يَجْهَلُ نَفْسَهُ كَيْفَ يَعْرِفُ رَبَّهُ

> I wonder how a person who does not know himself, could know his Lord.[7]

f) Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ تَجَرَّدَ

> Whosoever comes to recognise himself will attain freedom.[8]

g) Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) is reported to have said:

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ جَلَّ أَمْرُهُ

> He who recognises his soul, his position will become great.[9]

It is imperative to know that these traditions are not merely speaking of conceptual knowledge. The fundamental kind of knowledge is knowledge by presence and intuition. And there is an ontological and existential link between the knowledge of one's self and the knowledge of the Lord. This reality can also be understood by looking at the verse of *mīthāq* (divine oath) as follows:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِن ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۛ شَهِدْنَا ۛ أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَٰذَا غَافِلِينَ

> When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them witness themselves, [He said to them,] 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes indeed! We bear witness.' [This,] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed we were unaware of this.' (7:172)

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7 *Ibid.*, p. 329.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 452.

9 Al-Āmadī, *Taṣnīf Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, p. 232.

In this divine oath taken by Allah in the higher realm the descendants of Adam are made to witness themselves (*ashhadahum ʿalā anfusihim*) and are asked whether Allah is their Lord. This reveals that there is a close link between the vision of the self and the vision of the Lord. Otherwise Allah may have said ‘*wa ashhadahum ʿalā Rabbihim* (and made them witness their Lord)’. Observe how the expression ‘and made them witness themselves’ is followed immediately by the expression ‘Am I not your Lord’, which subtly alludes to the connection between the knowledge of oneself and the knowledge of one’s Lord. The philosophers reckon such a link to be ontological and existential.

Alluding to this subtlety, martyr Murtaḍā Muṭahharī in one of his speeches says:

> اینقدر خدا با بشر نزدیک است! اینقدر خودشناسی و خداشناسی با یکدیگر آمیخته است! می‌گوید بشر! خودت را ببین، تا خودش را می‌بیند می‌گوید آیا من پروردگار تو نیستم؟ تو خودت را ببینی مرا دیده‌ای، خودت را بشناسی مرا شناخته‌ای. جمله «من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربّه» هر کس خودش را بشناسد خدا را شناخته است...
>
> امیر المؤمنین از این تعبیرات، زیاد در کلماتش هست، در کلمات پیغمبر اکرم (ص) نیز هست، ولی به این زیبایی که در این آیه قرآن آمده احدی بیان نکرده است، با آن لسان رمزآمیز قرآن: بشر را به بشر ارائه داد و گفت خودت را ببین، تا خودش را دید گفت مرا خوب می‌بینی؟ گفت: آری، تو را خوب می‌بینم؛ نمی‌گوید «من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربّه»، دوتا معرفت ردیف نمی‌کند: معرفت خودت، تا بعد، از آن منتقل بشوی به معرفت خدا. اینقدر این دو معرفت به هم نزدیک است که اگر این را ببینی آن را دیده‌ای.
>
> God is extremely close to human beings; the knowledge of the self and knowledge of the Lord are extremely fused with one other. God says: Mankind!

> Look at yourself, and the moment he sees himself, God says: Am I not your Lord? If you see yourself, it is as if you have seen Me. If you have known yourself, you have known Me: *Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa Rabbahu* (whosoever comes to know himself, has already known his Lord)...
> We find many such expressions in the words of Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a) and we also find them in the words of the Holy Prophet (ṣ). However, no one has expressed it in such a beautiful way as in this verse (7:172) of the Qur'ān. It does not say 'Whosoever comes to know himself, has already known his Lord'; it does not bring two kinds of knowledge side by side... these two are so close to each other that if you see this, you have already seen that.[10]

Hence, if we truly would like to bear witness and declare that only Allah is *al-Rabb al-'Aẓīm*, we must have knowledge about the same. And such knowledge must not be limited to conceptual knowledge which is the beginning of the path, but presential knowledge which is attained through self-struggle and self-purification. When one attains this, true and quality declaration can be realised.

أَنْتَ الرَّبُّ الْعَظِيمُ

You are the Tremendous Lord

In the language of religion, expression is not a mere vocalisation. It rather reveals the reality of the state of the one who expresses. When one says, for example, '*You are the Tremendous Lord*' one actually is a submissive servant, otherwise expression makes no sense. Declaring Allah's Lordship therefore must not be a mere

10 Martyr Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *Majmū'e-ye Āthār-e Shahīd Muṭahharī* (A Collection of the Works of Martyr Muṭahharī), v. 13, pp. 353-354.

vocalisation and devoid of any practical representation. We noted earlier that *al-Rabb* is also reckoned to have been derived from *al-tarbiyah* (training). If we declare that Allah is our *Rabb*, we must follow whatever He says, for every command of His is for our training, development and perfection.

The Holy Qur'ān speaks about a group of people who say 'Our Lord is Allah' and enumerates some beautiful spiritual states for them. One cannot say that mere vocalisation and verbal expression of 'Our Lord is Allah' has made them achieve all that. It is rather their true belief in the Lordship of Allah and their respective actions that has made them enjoy the beautiful states.

Consider the following verses of the Qur'ān:

> إِنَّ الَّذِينَ **قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ** ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ
>
> Indeed those who say, '*Our Lord is Allah!*' and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, [saying,] 'Do not fear, nor be grieved! Receive the good news of the Garden of Heaven which you have been promised.' (41:30)

> إِنَّ الَّذِينَ **قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ** ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ
>
> Indeed those who say, '*Our Lord is Allah*,' and then remain steadfast, they will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (46:13)

In short, declaration is only correct when one truly considers Allah as one's Lord, and that is when one obeys the commands of Allah and accepts His training.

CHAPTER 4

الَّذِي لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

A Commentary on the phrase *Alladhī laysa ka-mithli-hī shay'*
(the like of Whom there is none)

... لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ ۖ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

... *Nothing is like Him*, and He is the All-Hearing,
the All-Seeing (42:11)

الَّذِي

One who...

Alladhī is a relative pronoun that refers to and speaks about the Tremendous Lord (*al-Rabb al-ʿAẓīm*). We describe Him as He describes Himself. He is one the like of whom there is none. This is because He is Essentially Independent and Infinite while the world of creation is dependent and finite.

الَّذِي لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

He, the like of whom there is none

Hence there is no comparison between Him and any kind of attributive lord that the ignorant ones try to believe in. In fact, since He is the Tremendous and Infinite Lord, no other being can ever be conceived.

In an interesting *ḥadīth* narrated in *al-Kāfī* of the esteemed *muḥaddith* (narrator of *ḥadīth*) Thiqat al-Islām al-Kulaynī, Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) is reported to have asked Ibn ʿUmayr, one of his companions, about his understanding of the expression ʿ*Allāhu Akbar* (Allah is Greater)', and Ibn ʿUmayr responded saying: ʿIt means Allah is greater than everything.' Thereupon the Imam (ʿa) said:

وَكَانَ ثَمّ شَيْءٌ فَيَكُوْنُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْهُ؟

> Hence does it mean that there was something, so that He is greater than it?

Ibn ʿUmayr said:

وَمَا هُوَ؟

Then what does it mean?

The Imam (ʻa) said:

اَللّٰهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أَنْ يُوْصَفَ

Allah is greater than description.[1]

Those well-acquainted with subtle allusions comprehend how important and fundamental this tradition is. The Imam (ʻa) actually does not conceive a second for God, whether before or after His existence, so that any comparison can be made.

... لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

... There is none like Him

This phrase refers to the aforementioned Qur'anic verse *Laysa kamithlihī shay'un wa Huwa al-Samīʻu al-Baṣīru* (Nothing is like Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing) which reveals Allah's transcendental reality. The anthropomorphists (*mushabbihah*) overlooked this explicit direction and stumbled to believe that God resembles the human being.

1 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 1, p. 118.

CHAPTER 5

وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

A Commentary on the phrase *Wa Huwa al-Samīʿu al-Baṣīru*
(while He alone is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing)

... لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ ۖ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

... Nothing is like Him, *and He is the All-Hearing*,
the All-Seeing (42:11)

وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

And He alone is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing

Scholars of insight[1] say that whereas the previous phrase (*Laysa ka mithlihī shay'*) which forms a part of verse 42:11 of the Holy Qur'ān refers to Allah's transcendence (*tanzīḥ*), the phrase under discussion alludes to His immanence (*tashbīh*). And this is the balance which true monotheists must observe.

The sentence *Huwa al-Samī' al-Baṣīr* signifies that the two divine names belong only to Allah. This is because, as we came to learn earlier, according to the rules of Arabic grammar, when the definite article *al* is prefixed to the predicate of a sentence, it means that the predicate is restricted for the subject. In our case here the article *al* appears on both *al-Samī'u* and *al-Baṣīru*, which are predicates, and hence they are exclusively for the subject *Huwa* (He) i.e. Allah.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his exegesis of the Qur'ān, *Tafsīr Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, when discussing the phrase '*wa Huwa al-Samī'u al-Baṣīru*' says it signifies the restriction of the two attributes for God. Then he continues:

> What then is the meaning of this restriction when the servants are also qualified with the two attributes? In response we say: *al-Samī'u* and *al-Baṣīru* are words that allude to [the] possession of these two attributes at their perfect level; and perfection in every attribute is for none other than Allah. This is the meaning of this restriction.[2]

1 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, p. 70.
2 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, v. 27, p. 154.

وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

And He alone is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing

Esteemed theologians opine that these are names that depict divine knowledge. They should not transport us to conjecture that Allah has ears or eyes as human beings do. In the words of Shaykh Mufīd, Allah is:

عالم بالمسموعات والمبصرات

He knows the audibilities and visibilities.[3]

This is because He is the Primal Cause of everything. The Holy Qur'ān says:

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

> *Would He who has created not know?* And He is the All-attentive, the All-aware. (67:14)

وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

And He alone is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing

A thought-provoking opinion the insightful scholars give is that because whatever exists in the world is a self-manifestation (*tajallī*) of Allah, no one save He is a hearer and seer. The spiritual wayfarers who attain the peak of divine proximity literally behold this reality. Amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ('a), for example, is reported to have said:

سَمِعْتُ رَسُوْلَ اللهِ صَلّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ يَقُوْلُ: عَلِيٌّ ... صِرَاطُ اللهِ الْمُسْتَقِيْمُ ...
وَهُوَ عَيْنُ اللهِ النَّاظِرَة، وَأُذُنُهُ السَّامِعَةُ

> I heard the Holy Prophet (ṣ) say: 'Alī is... the path of

3 Shaykh Mufīd, *al-Nukāt al-I'tiqādiyyah*, p. 24.

> Allah, which is straight… He [ʿAlī] is God's eye that sees (*ʿayn Allāh al-nāẓirah*), and His ear that listens (*udhunuhu al-sāmiʿah*).[4]

In another tradition Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) is reported to have said:

فَنَحْنُ أُذُنُهُ السَّامِعَةُ وَعُيُوْنُهُ النَّاظِرَةُ

Thus we are His [i.e. God's] listening ear and beholding eye.[5]

This station of beholding the reality, the insightful scholars believe, is attained through obligatory actions legislated by Allah. In their terminology it is a station of divine proximity that is called *qurb al-farā'iḍ* (proximity attained through obligatory deeds).

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4 ʿAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 40, p. 97.

5 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāa'ir al-Darajāt*, p. 82.

CHAPTER 6

وَهَذا شَهْرٌ عَظَّمْتَهُ وَكَرَّمْتَهُ وَشَرَّفْتَهُ وَفَضَّلْتَهُ عَلَى الشُّهُورِ

A Commentary on the phrase *Wa hādhā shahrun ʿaẓẓam-ta-hu wa karram-ta-hu wa sharraf-tahu wa faḍḍal-ta-hu ʿalā al-shuhūr* (And this is a month, which You have magnified, ennobled, elevated, and made superior over the rest of the months)

وَهَذا ...

And this is a month ...

The demonstrative noun *hādhā* (this) may depict the month to be something concrete and tangible, and not accidental (*'araḍī*) in the philosophical sense of the word. In simple terms, a month is a period of time which does not have a concrete existence. It is a derivative of the movements of the earth around the sun, and not palpable like the earth and the sun themselves. Scholars of insight however consider that the higher realities of such accidental phenomena in the Hereafter have tangible existence. The great mystic Āyatullāh Mīrzā Malikī Tabrīzī in his prayer manual *al-Murāqabāt* says:

> Know that although time, place and other inanimate objects lack comprehension in this world... all of them possess life, comprehension, speech, expression, love, and hatred in some of the higher realms of existence, as do many traditions about the states of the realms of *Barzakh* and the Resurrection, and intuitions of the folk of spiritual unfolding unravel.[1]

وَهَذا شَهْرٌ ...

And this is a month ...

The word *shahr* in the Arabic language refers to a month. According to the authoritative Andalusian lexicographer Ibn Sīda (d. 458 AH) it gained such a name due to its fame through the citing of the moon (*li annahu yashharu bi al-qamar*).[2] Interestingly, its

1 Mīrzā Malikī Tabrīzī, *al-Murāqabāt*, pp. 409-410.
2 Al-Zubaydī, *Tāj al-'Arūs*, v. 7, p. 66.

English equivalent - month - has a similar derivation; it also draws its origin from the word moon.[3]

عَظَّمْتَهُ ...

which You have magnified …

The word *'aẓẓama* literally means 'he made it very big or great'. According to some evidences, the cause of greatness of this month bestowed upon it by Allah, is due to the phenomenon of the Qur'ān's revelation, which transpires during a night that is better than a thousand months! (*khayrun min alfi shahr*). The Holy Qur'ān actually introduces this month not with the act of fasting but with the fundamental phenomenon of the revelation of the Qur'ān:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ ...

The month of Ramaḍān in which the Qur'ān was revealed… (2:185)

Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn ('a) in supplication forty-four of *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah* says:

فَحَرَّمَ فِيْهِ مَا أَحَلَّ فِيْ غَيْرِهِ **إِعْظَاماً**

> So He [Allah] prohibited in it what He made lawful in the rest of the months, for its *magnification*.[4]

Notice the word *i'ẓāman* is employed, which like *ta'ẓāman* signifies magnification.

In the supplication that our Twelfth Holy Imam ('aj) recited after prayer on the Day of *'Īd al-Fiṭr*, he says:

فَعَظَّمْتَ حُرْمَةَ شَهْرِ رَمَضانَ بِما أَنْزَلْتَ فيهِ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ ... **وَعَظَّمْتَهُ بِتَصْيِيرِكَ**

3 http://science.nasa.gov, 8/8/2012
4 Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn ('a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Supplication 44.

فيهِ لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ، فَقُلْتَ: لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ. تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ. سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ

And You magnified the sanctity of the month of Ramaḍān with what You revealed therein of the Qur'ān... *and You magnified it by placing therein the Night of Determination*, and You said: The Night of Determination is better than a thousand months; in it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command; it is peaceful until the rising of the dawn. (97:3-5)[5]

... وَكَرَّمْتَهُ ...

... and You have ennobled ...

Allah made this holy month *karīm* and noble. *Karāmah* according to some lexicographers signifies spiritual greatness. Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn ('a), describing how this month is ennobled by Allah, says in supplication forty-four of *al-Ṣaḥīfah*:

وَحَجَرَ فِيْهِ الْمَطَاعِمَ وَالْمَشَارِبَ **إِكْرَاماً**

He prohibited foods and drinks in it *to ennoble* it.

Actually, according to the Qur'ān, the foundation and criterion of *karāmah* (nobility) is *taqwā* (God-wariness). And because it is a month when *taqwā* is practically implemented it is a month of *karāmah* (nobility).

This indicates that it is due to some of the things that human beings do in the holy month that makes it noble and great.

Another translation for *karramtahu* can also be 'You have honoured it'. Thus not partaking of food and drink in the holy

5 Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl al-A'māl*, v. 1, p. 469.

month, according to Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (ʿa), is to honour it.

... وَشَرَّفْتَهُ

*... **and elevated it***

Allah made this month elevated (*sharraftahu*). Perhaps it is due to the facilities placed in this month for achieving spiritual elevation.

وَفَضَّلْتَهُ عَلَى الشُّهُورِ

and made superior over the rest of the months.

The well-known prophetic sermon of the holy month of Shaʿbān al-Muʿaẓẓam alludes to expressions that reveal the superiority and excellence of this holy month. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

> شَهْرٌ هُو عِندَ اللهِ أَفْضَلُ الشُّهُورِ، وَ أَيَّامُهُ أَفْضَلُ الْأَيَّامِ، وَ لَيَالِيهِ أَفْضَلُ اللَّيَالِي،
> وَ سَاعَاتُهُ أَفْضَلُ السَّاعَاتِ
>
> It is a month which to Allah is the best of the months, its days the best of days, its nights the best of nights, its hours the best of hours.

Akin to the verse under discussion where the phrase ʻ*faḍḍalta-hu* (You made it superior)’ is employed, the word *afḍal* is frequently used in the above sermon of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) to signify the superiority of the month, its days, its nights and its hours.

In reality, the holy month of Ramaḍān is an opportunity for every penitent human being to progress and soar to divine proximity easily and quickly. Unlike the rest of the months, the holy month of Ramaḍān facilitates a speedy spiritual uplift for every true aspirant of change and transformation. Hence we must always seek divine help and succour to be resolute in utilising every moment of it.

CHAPTER 7

وَهُوَ الشَّهْرُ الَّذِي فَرَضْتَ صِيَامَهُ عَلَيَّ

A Commentary on the phrase *Wa huwa al-shahru alladhī faraḍ-ta ṣiyāma-hu ʿalayya*
(And it is a month whose fast You have made compulsory on me)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ **عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ** كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O you who have faith! *Prescribed for you is fasting* as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary. (2:183)

... فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ الشَّهْرَ **فَلْيَصُمْهُ** ...

... So let those of you who witness it *fast [in] it*.... (2:185)

... فَرَضْتَ صِيَامَهُ ...

...whose fast You have made compulsory...

The phrase '*faraḍ-ta*' means 'You made obligatory'. According to the well-known tradition of *qurb al-farā'iḍ* (proximity through obligatory deeds) quoted by the insightful scholars, that which Allah has made obligatory makes one attain a higher degree of spiritual elevation than that which is recommended and supererogatory (*al-nawāfil*). The clause mentioned in the tradition that emphasises this point is:

وَمَا يَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَيَّ عَبْدٌ مِنْ عِبَادِيْ بِشَيْءٍ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا افْتَرَضْتَ عَلَيْهِ

> And My servant does not draw near to Me through a thing that I love, *more than that which I have made obligatory on him.*[1]

... فَرَضْتَ صِيَامَهُ عَلَيَّ

...whose fast You have made compulsory on me

It is important for us to realise that although the words *faraḍ-ta* (You made [it] obligatory) apparently reveals divine majesty (*jalāl*) and calls us to be alert, but it encapsulates within itself nothing but divine beauty (*jamāl*), mercy, love and goodness. This is because there are ample benefits of fasting. In fact, according to a sacred tradition (*ḥadīth qudsī*) narrated by the Holy Prophet (ṣ), the reward of fasting is said to be Allah Himself:

يَقُوْلُ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: اَلصَّوْمُ لِيْ وَأَنَّا أُجْزَي بِهِ

> Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, says: Fasting is for

1 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 2, p. 352.

Me, and I am its reward.[2]

In other words, fasting enables one to soar to the heights of perfection and attain the proximity of Allah. For a detailed exposition of this reality you may refer to pages 41 and 42 of our treatise *The Divine Invitation*.[3]

... فَرَضْتَ صِيَامَهُ عَلَيَّ

...whose fast You have made compulsory on me

The following verse of the Holy Qur'ān alludes to the fact that fasting was made compulsory:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

> O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary. (2:183)

Unless one is faced by internal or external hurdles as mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān and the authentic traditions of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), it is compulsory on every male and female to fast in the holy month of Ramaḍān. The authorities of Islamic law have explained the details of the rules and regulations of fasting and every believer on whom fasting is obligatory must know them, in order to observe the fast as it must be observed, and to attain its material and spiritual benefits.

2 Al-Maghribī, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, v. 1, p. 270.

3 Available from The World Federation of KSIMC: www.world-federation.org; www. wfshop.org

... فَرَضْتَ صِيَامَهُ عَلَيَّ

...whose fast You have made compulsory on me

Interestingly, instead of *al-ṣawm*, the word *al-ṣiyām* has been employed. This subtlety shows us that what is actually required from us is the result of the action (*natījat al-ḥadath*) of *ṣawm* (fasting), and not only the act (*ḥadath*) of fasting (*ṣawm*). The word *ṣiyām*, being the noun of the infinitive (*ism al-maṣdar*) and not an infinitive (*maṣdar*), linguistically signifies the result of fasting. And that is what is really important. This is because many of us fast, but reap substantially less than the potential benefits.

In short, what is anticipated from us is not merely the act of *al-ṣawm*, but the state of *al-ṣiyām*, which is the spiritual result of fasting.

Small wonder it is that some traditions do not reckon the mere abstinence from food, drink, legal sexual union, etc. as the true act of fasting that is anticipated from a faithful one. Consider the following traditions:

1. Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah al-Zahrā' ('a) is reported to have said:

مَا يَصْنَعُ الصَّائِمُ بِصِيَامِهِ إِذَا لَمْ يَصُنْ لِسَانَهُ وَسَمْعَهُ وَبَصَرَهُ وَجَوَارِحَه

> *What should the fasting one do with his fast, if he did not protect* his tongue, hearing, sight and members of his body?[4]

Ḥaḍrat Zahrā' ('a) informs us indirectly that such a fast that only adheres to the apparent laws has little value.

2. Ibn 'Ajlāl reports from Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a):

4 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 93, p. 295.

لَيْسَ الصِّيَامُ مِنَ الطَّعَامِ وَ الشَّرَابِ أَنْ لَا يَأْكُلَ الْإِنْسَانُ وَلَا يَشْرَبَ فَقَطْ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا صُمْتَ فَلْيَصُمْ سَمْعُكَ وَبَصَرُكَ وَلِسَانُكَ وَبَطْنُكَ وَفَرْجُكَ وَاحْفَظْ يَدَكَ وَفَرْجَكَ وَأَكْثِرِ السُّكُوتَ إِلَّا مِنْ خَيْرٍ وَارْفُقْ بِخَادِمِكَ

Fasting from food and drink does not [merely] mean that the human being should not eat or drink; rather, when you fast, then your ears, eyes, tongue, stomach and private parts must [also] fast; and safeguard your hand and private part and observe silence most of the times save from what is good to say; and be kind to your servant.[5]

Here Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa) informs his companion that when one fasts the commonly known physical fast one must understand that there is more to the outer rules and regulations. Fasting requires one to ensure that all the members of one's body are also fasting.

3. Alluding to the real kind of fast anticipated from the servants of Allah, Imam Zayn al-ʻĀbidīn (ʻa) in his supplication on welcoming the holy month of Ramaḍān says:

وَأَعِنَّا عَلَى صِيَامِهِ بِكَفِّ الْجَوَارِحِ عَنْ مَعَاصِيْكَ، وَاسْتِعْمَالِهَا فِيهِ بِمَا يُرْضِيْكَ حَتَّى لاَ نُصْغِيَ بِأَسْمَاعِنَا إِلَى لَغْوٍ، وَلَا نُسْرِعَ بِأَبْصَارِنَا إِلَى لَهْوٍ، وَحَتَّى لاَ نَبْسُطَ أَيْدِيَنَا إِلَى مَحْظُورٍ، وَلاَ نَخْطُوَ بِأَقْدَامِنَا إِلَى مَحْجُورٍ، وَحَتَّى لاَ تَعِيَ بُطُونُنَا إلاَّ مَا أَحْلَلْتَ، وَلا تَنْطِقَ أَلْسِنَتُنَا إلاَّ بِمَا مَثَّلْتَ، وَلا نَتَكَلَّفَ إلاَّ ما يُدْنِي مِنْ ثَوَابِكَ، وَلاَ نَتَعَاطَى إلاَّ الَّذِي يَقِيْ مِنْ عِقَابِكَ

And help us to fast in it by us restraining our limbs from acts of disobedience toward Thee and our employing them in that which pleases Thee, so that we lend not our ears to idle talk and hurry not with our eyes to diversion, we stretch not our hands toward the forbidden and stride not with our feet toward the

5 ʻAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 94, p. 352.

> prohibited, our bellies hold only what Thou hast made lawful and our tongues speak only what Thou hast exemplified, we undertake nothing but what brings close to Thy reward and pursue nothing but what protects from Thy punishment![6]

Note that Imam Zayn al-ʻĀbidīn (ʻa) makes no mention of abstaining from food or drink when mentioning fasting although they are vital conditions for its validity. Rather he seeks the protection of the different members of the body from sin. The reason for this, perhaps, is to draw our attention to the spirit of the true fast.

In conclusion, one must aspire to achieve the fundamental purpose of fasting, and that is divine proximity. And that cannot be achieved save through *taqwā* (God-wariness) in different dimensions and levels. Hence, in addition to what one has been obliged to abstain from when fasting, one must also refrain from all those things that Allah is displeased with.

6 Imam al-Sajjād (ʻa), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Supplication 44.

CHAPTER 8

وَهُوَ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ

A Commentary on the phrase *Wa huwa shahru Ramaḍān*
(And it is the month of Ramaḍān)

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ ...

The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur'an was sent down .... (2:185)

وَهُوَ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ

And it is the month of Ramaḍān

It is the month of Allah, because Ramaḍān is one of the divine names. In a *ḥadīth* narrated in *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, Imam al-Bāqir ('a) is reported to have said the following to some of his companions:

> لَا تَقُولُوا هَذَا رَمَضَانُ وَلَا ذَهَبَ رَمَضَانُ وَلَا جَاءَ رَمَضَانُ فَإِنَّ رَمَضَانَ اسْمٌ مِنْ أَسْمَاءِ اللّٰهِ لَا يَجِيءُ وَلَا يَذْهَبُ وَإِنَّمَا يَجِيءُ وَيَذْهَبُ الزَّائِلُ وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا **شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ**
>
> Do not say 'This is Ramaḍān', nor say 'Ramaḍān went' or 'Ramaḍān has come', for surely Ramaḍān is a name among the names of Allah; neither does it come, nor does it go; and indeed only one who perishes comes and goes; instead, say: '*The month of Ramaḍān*'.[1]

Some scholars however opine that what is important here is the intention of a person saying Ramaḍān. If he were to say it knowing the fact that he is referring to the month of Ramaḍān, then it would be acceptable.

وَهُوَ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ

And it is the month of Ramaḍān

It is a month that burns off one's sins. In a *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

> وَإِنَّمَا سُمِّيَ رَمَضَانُ رَمَضَانَ لِأَنَّهُ تُرْمَضُ فِيهِ الذُّنُوبُ أَيْ تُحْرَق

1 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, p. 331.

> And indeed the month of Ramaḍān was named *Ramaḍān* because sins are burned therein.[2]

In simple words, the word *Ramaḍān* is the infinitive of the verb *ramaḍa*, which means *iḥtaraqa* (it got burnt).

2 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v. 7, p. 484.

CHAPTER 9

... الَّذِي أَنْزَلْتَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنَ

A Commentary on the phrase *Alladhī anzal-ta fī-hī al-Qur'ān*
(in which You sent down the Qur'ān)

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ ...

The month of Ramaḍān is one *in which the Qur'ān was sent down* .... (2:185)

الَّذِي ...

One who...

Alladhī here is a relative pronoun that refers to and speaks about the holy month of Ramaḍān. In simple words, it reveals that what follows is a description of what precedes it. And since this supplication is taught by our Imams (ʿa), it is imperative for us to introduce the holy month in a similar way when we would like to talk about it. Furthermore, the description that is to follow has been taken from the Holy Qur'ān, and is therefore the best and most accurate description.

... أَنْزَلْتَ ...

*... **You sent down** ...*

The infinitive of the past tense verb *anzalta* is *al-inzāl* (to send down all at once) which refers to the all-at-once revelation that occurred on the Night of Determination. The gradual revelation of the Qur'ān, however, is known as *al-tanzīl* which transpired over the course of twenty-three years. The following are references to the two kinds of revelation:

(a) Al-Inzāl (Collective Revelation):

The Holy Qur'ān says:

> وَهَـٰذَا كِتَابٌ **أَنزَلْنَاهُ** مُبَارَكٌ مُّصَدِّقُ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلِتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا ۚ وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۖ وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ
>
> Blessed is this Book which *We have sent* down, confirming what was revealed before it, so that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those around it.

Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are watchful of their prayers. (6:92)

إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

Indeed We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān so that you may apply reason. (12:2)

إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment. (97:1)

(b) Al-Tanzīl (Gradual Revelation):
The Holy Qur'ān says:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Indeed *We have sent down* the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it. (15:9)

وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْهِم مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ ۖ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَىٰ هَٰؤُلَاءِ ۚ
وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

The day We raise in every nation a witness against them from among themselves, We shall bring you as a witness against these. *We have sent down* the Book to you as a clarification of all things and as a guidance and mercy and good news for the Muslims. (16:89)

Notice carefully that whereas in the first set of verses the verbs *anzalnā* (We sent down all-at-once) have been employed the second set of verses contain the verbs *nazzalnā* (We sent down gradually).

In the phrase under discussion, as we mentioned in the beginning, what is referred to is the revelation of the Qur'ān in its entirety on

the heart of the Holy Prophet (ṣ), and not the gradual revelation that occurred over twenty-three years in the Prophet (ṣ)'s life.

الَّذِي أَنْزَلْتَ ...

which You sent down…

Note that the phrase '*anzal-ta* (You sent it down)' signifies that Allah Himself brings down the Qur'ān. One must not conjecture therefore that the intermediaries have any kind of independent power, knowledge or volition.

... فِيهِ ...

…in which [You sent down the Qur'ān]…

The pronoun *hu* in the phrase *fī-hī* refers to the holy month of Ramaḍān, for the Qur'ān was revealed on *Laylat al-Qadr* which is in the holy month of Ramaḍān.

أَنْزَلْتَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنَ

in which You sent down the Qur'ān

We must note that the Qur'ān is the most comprehensive message of Allah and thus it requires a heart that is most comprehensive. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) and his infallible progeny ('a) enjoy the most comprehensive hearts and can thus contain the Qur'ān. No wonder that they are also known to be *Laylat al-Qadr* themselves. In a beautiful *ḥadīth* narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a), *Laylat al-Qadr* is known to signify the blessed being of Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah Zahrā' ('a), who, resembling the Qur'ānic receptacle of her father, can also contain the Qur'ān.

ʿAllāmah Majlisī in his *Biḥār al-Anwār* narrates from *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī* which narrates a *ḥadīth* from Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa) who is reported to have said:

> (إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ)، اَللَّيْلَةُ فاطِمَة الزَّهْرَاء وَالْقَدْرُ اَللهُ فَمَنْ عَرَفَ فَاطِمَةَ حَقَّ مَعْرِفَتِهَا فَقَدْ أَدْرَكَ لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ، وَإِنَّمَا سُمِّيَتْ فَاطِمَة لأَنَّ الْخَلْقَ فُطِمُوْا عَنْ مَعْرِفَتِهَا
>
> (Indeed We sent it down in the Night of Qadr), Night here refers to Fāṭimah (ʿa) and Qadr refers to Allah; whosoever knows Fāṭimah the way she ought to be known has indeed experienced the Night of Qadr; and indeed Fāṭimah was known as Fāṭimah because the creation were detached from knowledge about her.[1]

In our epoch, the receptacle is the heart of the Imam of the time (ʿaj). The Holy Qurʾān is truly comprehended by his lofty heart.

ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm in his exegesis of Qurʾān called *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, commenting on the verse ʻ*the angels and the Spirit descend in it...*ʼ says:

> **تنزل الملائكة وروح القدس على إمام الزمان**، ويدفعون إليه ما قد كتبوه من هذه الأمور
>
> *The angels and the Holy Spirit descend on the Imam of the Time*; they convey to him what they wrote of these matters.[2]

In another hadith Imam al-Bāqir (ʿa) is asked whether he knew when *Laylat al-Qadr* is, and he said:

> وَكَيْفَ لاَ نَعْرِف [لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ] وَالْمَلاَئِكَةُ تَطُوْفُ بِنَا فِيْهَا!
>
> And how can we not know [the Night of

1 ʿAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 43, p. 65.

2 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, v. 2, p. 431.

> Determination] while the angels circumambulate around us therein![3]

In conclusion: the following are two kinds of receptacles of the Qur'ān:

(1) The receptacle of time which is one of the great nights of the holy month of Ramaḍān, and,

(2) The human receptacle, which is the comprehensive heart of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) or that of any of the rest of the fourteen infallibles of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʻa).

... أَنْزَلْتَ ...

... You sent down ...

The scholars of insight opine that the sending down (*al-inzāl*) of the Qur'ān should not transport us to the descent of a material entity which transpires by displacement (*al-tajāfī*) signifying that the origin remains empty after the entity has descended. Rather, the descent of the Qur'ān is through *al-tajallī*, which means that that which is received by the heart is a lower manifestation of that which is with God.

... أَنْزَلْتَ ...

... You sent down ...

Scholars of insight also inform us that *al-inzāl* or descent of the Qur'ān is another expression for the ascent of the Muḥammadan heart. This is a Qur'ānic and intellectual reality.

3 Sayyid al-Baḥrānī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, v. 5, p. 715.

أَنْزَلْتَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنَ

in which You sent down the Qur'ān

The trilateral root meaning of the word *qur'ān* is *jam'* (to gather). Some scholars opine that it is known to be so because it gathers in itself its chapters (*yajma' al-suwar*) or the fruits of the previous heavenly scriptures (*yajma' thamarāt al-kutub al-samāwiyyah*).

While elucidating the root word of Qur'ān, Ibn Faris, explaining why the Qur'ān is called 'Qur'ān', says:

كأنّه سمّى بذلك لجمعه ما فيه من الأحكام والقصص وغير ذلك

> It seems that it was called that because it gathers what it contains of the [Islamic] laws, stories, and other matters.[4]

أَنْزَلْتَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنَ

in which You sent down the Qur'ān

It is imperative to know that the Holy Qur'ān has two different levels of existence: the non-composite level (*basīṭ*) which is with Allah, and the composite and fragmented (*murakkab*) that was sent gradually in the course of twenty-three years of the Holy Prophet (ṣ)'s life.

With regard to the first reality Allah says:

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ. فِي كِتَابٍ مَّكْنُونٍ. لَّا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ

> Indeed it is the noble Qur'ān, in the hidden book, none save the purified ones touch it. (56:77-79)

4 Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, v. 5, p. 79.

Only those close to Allah whose hearts have been purified like the infallible Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), have access to this high level of the Holy Qur’ān near Allah.

In chapter 43, verse 4, Allah says:

وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلِيٌّ حَكِيمٌ

> And indeed it [the Qur’ān] is with Us in the Mother Book [and it is] surely sublime and wise. (43:4)

This verse, according to insightful exegetes, alludes to the Qur’ān in its original station, which is introduced as *la-‘aliyyun ḥakim* (sublime and wise) because it is beyond the access of the common intellect, and it has no sections or parts.[5]

With regard to the second reality Allah says:

وَقُرْآنًا فَرَقْنَاهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَىٰ مُكْثٍ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ تَنزِيلًا

> We have sent the Qur’ān in [discrete] parts so that you may read it to the people a little at a time, and We have sent it down piecemeal. (17:106)

Commenting on this verse, ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī says:

> وهو ظاهر في نزوله تدريجا في مجموع مدة الدعوة وهي ثلث وعشرون سنة تقريبا، والمتواتر من التاريخ يدل على ذلك
>
> And this [verse] apparently signifies that the Qur’ān was sent gradually within the total period of the Prophet (ṣ)’s call which is approximately twenty-three years, and successively narrated historical evidence reveals this.[6]

5 ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, v. 2, p. 17.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

CHAPTER 10

هُدىً لِلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ

A Commentary on the phrase *Hudan linnāsi wa bayyinātin min al-hudā wa al-furqān*
(A guidance for people and clear proofs of guidance and the criterion)

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ

هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ ...

The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur'ān was sent down *as guidance to mankind, with manifest proofs of guidance and the criterion ….* (2:185)

هُدىً لِلنَّاسِ

Guidance for people

Therefore my duty as a Muslim is not merely to read it with proper pronunciation, but rather to struggle and attain its meaning so that I can follow the same and thus be guided. This is the fundamental purpose of the Qur'ān.

هُدىً لِلنَّاسِ

Guidance for people

Qur'ān is a guidance for all people (*li al-nās*). The Holy Qur'ān says:

> شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ **هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ** وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ ...
>
> The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur'ān was sent down *as guidance to mankind*, with manifest proofs of guidance and the criterion... (2:185)

It informs us that the teachings of the Qur'ān are not meant for Muslims only, but are for *al-nās* which means 'all the people' or 'mankind' in general. Hence those who have taken the responsibility to spread the word of the truth must try to present it in a way that attracts *al-nās* (everyone). Furthermore there are several verses in the Qur'ān where Allah, the All-Merciful, addresses the human beings in general, and no specific group of believers is addressed.

The following are some examples worthy of reflection:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be God-wary. (2:21)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

O mankind! Eat of what is lawful and pure in the earth, and do not follow in Satan's steps. Indeed he is your manifest enemy. (2:168)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُم مِّن نَّفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and, from the two of them, scattered numerous men and women. Be wary of Allah, in whose name you adjure one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is watchful over you. (4:1)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُم بُرْهَانٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُّبِينًا

O mankind! Certainly a proof has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a manifest light. (4:174)

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّن دِينِي فَلَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَـٰكِنْ أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ ۖ وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Say, 'O people! If you are in doubt about my religion, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship besides Allah. Rather I worship only Allah, who causes you to die, and I have been commanded to be among the faithful.' (10:104)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِن مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ ۚ وَنُقِرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ۖ وَمِنكُم مَّن يُتَوَفَّىٰ وَمِنكُم مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مِن بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا ...

O people! If you are in doubt about the resurrection, [consider that] We indeed created you from dust, then from a drop of [seminal] fluid, then from a clinging mass, then from a fleshy tissue, partly formed and partly unformed, so that We may manifest [Our power] to you. We establish in the wombs whatever We wish for a specified term, then We bring you forth as infants, then [We rear you] so that you may come of age. [Then] there are some of you who are taken away, and there are some of you who are relegated to the nethermost age, so that he knows nothing after [having possessed] some knowledge… (22:5)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ لَن يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوِ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ ۖ وَإِن يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَّا يَسْتَنقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ۚ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ

O mankind! Listen to a parable that is being drawn: Indeed those whom you invoke besides Allah will never create [even] a fly, even if they all rallied to do

so! And if a fly should take away something from them, they cannot recover that from it. Feeble is the seeker and the sought! (22:73)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللهِ عَلَيْكُمْ ۚ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرُ اللهِ يَرْزُقُكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ لَا إِلَـٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ فَأَنَّىٰ تُؤْفَكُونَ

O mankind! Remember Allah's blessing upon you! Is there any creator other than Allah who provides for you from the sky and the earth? There is no god except Him. So where do you stray? (35:3)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللهِ ۖ وَاللهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah - He is the All-Sufficient, the All-Laudable. (35:15)

Hence one of the challenges the Muslims face is to present the Qur'ān in such a way that non-Muslims are attracted to it and aspire to read it. In our translations for example, a blend of simplicity, clarity and succinctness is essential. The kind of pages, fonts, typesetting, etc. is also another dimension which must not be overlooked. Advertising it in different areas according to the environment and atmosphere is also another issue. In short, the Qur'ān is also for *yā ayyuha al-nās* (O mankind!), and hence let us not limit it to *yā ayyuha-lladhīna āmanū* (O you who believe!).

Is there Any Contradiction?

It may be argued that this verse contradicts the verse ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ ۛ فِيهِ ۛ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ (That is the Book, in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the God-wary (2:2)) which states that the Qur'ān is a guidance for the God-wary in particular. In response we mention the following two probabilities:

1. the first verse is general and the second is specific, and hence there is no contradiction, and

2. the first refers to initial guidance which is the conceptual knowledge of the truth, whereas the second refers to existential transformation and change which is belief, action, spiritual elevation, etc. all of which are specific to the *muttaqūn* (God-wary).

وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِنَ الْهُدَى ...

and Clear Proofs of Guidance...

The Qur'ān is a book of clear proofs of guidance. The word *bayyināt* is the plural of *bayyinah* which signifies a clear proof. In the verse 2:185 quoted previously, the phrase '...with clear proofs of guidance...' reveals this reality.

... وَالْفُرْقَانِ

...and the criterion

The Qur'ān is a criterion that enables us to distinguish between the truth and falsehood. *Al-Furqān* is another name of the Holy Qur'ān.

Referring to this name, the Holy Qur'ān says:

> نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَاةَ وَالْإِنجِيلَ. مِن قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ **وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ** ۗ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ ۗ وَاللهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انتِقَامٍ
>
> He has sent down to you the Book with the truth confirming what was [revealed] before it, and He

> had sent down the Torah and the Evangel before as guidance for mankind, *and He has sent down the Criterion.* Indeed those who defy the signs of Allah, there is a severe punishment for them; and Allah is All-Mighty, Avenger. (3:3-4)

Shaykh Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayḥī (d. 1085), the venerable Shia lexicographer, says:

> وكل ما فُرِّقَ به بين الحقِّ والباطلِ **فهو فُرْقان** ...
>
> And that by which is distinguished between truth and falsehood is *furqān*...[1]

Explaining the meaning of *al-Furqān*, Amīn al-Islām Shaykh al-Ṭabrasī (d. 548) says:

> ومن أسمائه **الفرقان**: سمي بذلك **لأنه يفرق بين الحق والباطل** بأدلته الدالة على صحة الحق فبطلان الباطل
>
> The Qur'ān is called that [i.e. *al-Furqān*] because it distinguishes between truth and falsehood (*li annahu yufarriqu bayna al-ḥaqq wa al bāṭil*) through its proofs that show the correctness of truth and the invalidity of falsehood.[2]

1 Shaykh al-Ṭurayḥī, *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*, v. 3, p. 393.
2 Shaykh al-Ṭabrasī, *Tafsīr Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, v. 1, p. 41.

CHAPTER 11

وَجَعَلْتَ فِيهِ لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ

A Commentary on the phrase *Wa jaʿal-ta fī-hī laylat al-Qadr*
(And You placed therein the Night of Determination)

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ ...

The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur'ān was sent down …. (2:185)

إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Greatness. (42:4)

لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ

the Night of Greatness

The word *qadr* is sometimes employed to signify *'aẓamah* (greatness). So great is this night that the human being is challenged about its comprehension. Allah, the Exalted, says in the Qur'ān:

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ

> And what will show you what is the Night of Greatness? (97:2)

In his Qur'ānic exegesis *al-Mīzān*, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī commenting on this verse says:

> "This is a metonymy (*kināyah*) signifying the loftiness of the value of this night and the greatness of its station."[1]

لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ

the Night of Greatness

The word *qadr* is sometimes employed to signify *al-taqdīr* (determination): Allah placed in this holy month a night in which the affairs of people for the entire year are determined. In a *ḥadīth* narrated from Faḍl ibn Shādhān, Imam al-Riḍā ('a) explaining *Laylat al-Qadr*, says:

وَيُقَدَّرُ فِيهَا مَا يَكُونُ فِي السَّنَةِ مِنْ خَيْرٍ أَوْ شَرٍّ أَوْ مَضَرّةٍ أَوْ مَنْفَعَةٍ أَوْ رِزْقٍ أَوْ أَجَلٍ، وَلِذَلِكَ سُمّيَتْ لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْر

1 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, v. 20, p. 332.

> And in it is determined what will happen that year: the good, the evil, the harm, the benefit, the provision and one's life span; and for this reason it was named the Night of Determination.[2]

Is Determination Compulsion?

It is imperative to know that when we speak of *taqdīr* and the determination of virtues, evils, rewards, punishment, etc. that will transpire throughout the year, we do not speak of something that evades the volition of the human being and his effects. That which is determined for the year is the result of one's struggle and achievement on the Night of Determination. And it is drawn from the pre-eternal knowledge of Allah and does not contradict the human will and choice.

Therefore if, for example, one struggles on the Night of Determination, seeks divine forgiveness, prays and asks for material and spiritual advantages of life, Allah will destine for one with whatever one deserves throughout the year. Obviously that does not mean that his volition will lose its value in that period. Rather, he would have earned a level that would enable him to volitionally perform specific things that would have its respective positive results. Hence, it is incorrect to question that if for example, lots of divine bounties are written for one, but later during the year one performs deeds that deprive one from such bounties, will one's destiny change? This is because due to one's struggle on the great nights one has attained such a level that one would always do things that would facilitate divine bounties. Likewise is the situation with one who was heedless on the great nights: since one has not acquired a desired level of perfection, one can be inclined to deeds of evil, and of afflictions, etc.

Hence what is given to the divine receptacle is from the pre-eternal source of divine knowledge which completely accords to what will

2 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *'Ilal al-Sharāyi'*, v. 1, p. 270.

transpire throughout the year. It is not a compulsion and coercion, but a definite foresight provided by Allah who has the Mother of the Book (*Umm al-Kitāb*) which never changes.

لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ

the Night of Greatness

In our traditions we are taught to observe night vigil during three specific nights: the nineteenth, the twenty-first and the twenty-third of Ramadan. Which, then, is specifically the *Laylat al- Qadr*?

According to a tradition, the twenty-third is explicitly known as the Night of *Qadr*:

Sufyān ibn al-Simtī narrates:

قُلْتُ لِأَبِي عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع) أَفْرِدْ لِي لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ، قَالَ: **لَيْلَةُ ثَلَاثٍ وَعِشْرِين**

> I asked Abā ʿAbdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (ʿa): Specify for me which night particularly is *Laylat al-Qadr*? He said: *The twenty-third night*.[3]

In another tradition, Imam al-Bāqir (ʿa) is asked: How do I know that *Laylatul Qadr takes place every year*? And he replied:

إِذَا أَتى شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ، فَاقْرَأْ سُورَةَ الدُّخَانِ فِي كُلِّ لَيْلَةٍ مِائَةَ مَرَّةٍ، فَإِذَا أَتَتْ **لَيْلَةُ ثَلَاثٍ وَعِشْرِين**، فَإِنَّكَ نَاظِرٌ إِلى تَصْدِيقِ الَّذِي سَأَلْتَ عَنْه

> When the month of Ramaḍān arrives, recite *Sūrat al-Dukhān* [chapter 44 of the Qur'ān] a hundred times every night, and when the *twenty-third night* arrives, indeed you shall behold the verification that you asked about.[4]

3 Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*, v. 1, p. 206.

4 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 1, p. 196.

However, this does not mean that the nineteenth and twenty-first nights have no significance. Each of the three nights has a decisive role to play. Consider the following hadith:

> عَنْ عَبْدِ الْوَاحِدِ بْنِ الْمُخْتَارِ قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ (ع) عَنْ لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ – قَالَ: **فِي لَيْلَتَيْنِ**: **لَيْلَةِ ثَلَاثٍ وَعِشْرِينَ وَإِحْدَى وَعِشْرِينَ**، فَقُلْتُ: أَفْرِدْ لِي إِحْدَاهُمَا، قال: **وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَنْ تَعْمَلَ فِي لَيْلَتَيْنِ هِيَ إِحْدَاهُمَا**
>
> ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Mukhtār narrates: I asked Abā Jaʿfar [Imam al-Bāqir (ʿa)] about *Laylat al-Qadr* and he said: *It is in two nights, the twenty-third and the twenty-first.* I then asked: Specify for me which of them is the particular night? He replied: *What is the issue if you worship in the two nights, one of which is the [very] night?*[5]

If we look at other traditions we shall come to realise that the nineteenth and twenty-first nights serve as preliminaries to the twenty-third. Consider the following *ḥadīth*:

> عَنْ زُرَارَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللهِ (ع): التَّقْدِيرُ فِي لَيْلَةِ تِسْعَ عَشْرَةَ، وَالْإِبْرَامُ فِي لَيْلَةِ إِحْدَى وَعِشْرِينَ، وَالْإِمْضَاءُ فِي لَيْلَةِ ثَلَاثٍ وَعَشْرِينَ
>
> Zurārah is reported to have narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʿa): Determination (*al-taqdīr*) is on the nineteenth night, establishment (*al-ibrām*) is on the twenty-first night, and signing off (*al-imḍāʾ*) is on the twenty-third night.[6]

This tradition apparently informs us that the twenty-third night is the pinnacle and it is the night when the final resolution is given. Hence one must try to continue one's struggle before that. In fact struggle and preparation begins from the very first night of the holy month of Ramaḍān or even much earlier!

5 Al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿah*, v. 10, p. 360.

6 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 4, p. 159.

لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ

the Night of Greatness

The insightful scholars have written in their works that the reality of *Laylat al-Qadr* is *Yawm al-Qiyāmah* (the Day of Judgement). The former is the descent of the reality of the latter. In his Forty Traditions, Imam Khumayni, under his discussion on the exegesis of *Sūrat al-Tawḥīd* and some verses of *Sūrat al-Ḥadīd*, says:

> According to the creed of gnosis, the descending levels of existence until the lowest point - which is the plane of concealment of the sun of existence by curtains of finitude and differentiation (*ta'ayyunāt*) - constitute the reality of the Night of Determination and the beginning of the Day of Resurrection is from the first stage of return of mulk (the terrestrial realm) to *malakūt* (the celestial realm) and removal of the curtains of *ta'ayyunāt* to the ultimate levels of manifestation and return, which is the complete appearance of the Greatest Resurrection (*Qiyāmat-e Kubrā*).[7]

Comprehension of Laylat al-Qadr therefore is perhaps in appreciating the reality of the
Judgement Day.

لَيْلَةَ الْقَدْرِ

the Night of Greatness

In his mystical masterpiece *Miṣbāḥ al-Hidāyah*, Imam Khumayni says:

> Our Shaykh and teacher in divine knowledge and

7 Imam Khumayni, *Forty Hadtih* (Eng. Trans), p. 660.

teachings, the perfect gnostic, Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh Ābādī Iṣfahānī, may God make the days of his blessings last, in reply to my question about the manner of divine revelation in the very first meeting that I was honoured with his presence, said, among other things, thus: the *Hā'* (it) in the divine words, '*Innā anzalnāHU f Laylat al-Qadr* (Indeed We revealed IT on the Night of Determination)' is an allusion to the unseen reality (*al-ḥaqīqah al-ghaybiyyah*) sent down in the Muḥammadan structure (*al-Bunyah al-Muḥammadiyyah*), which is the reality of the Night of Determination.[8]

8 Imam Khumayni, *The Lamp of Guidance Into Vicegerency & Sanctity*, pp. 24-25

CHAPTER 12

وَجَعَلْتَهَا خَيْراً مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

A Commentary on the phrase *Wa ja'al-ta-hā khayran min alfi shahr* (and You made it better than a thousand months)

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

The Night of Determination *is better than a thousand months.* (97:3)

... خَيْراً مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

... better than a thousand months

This portion of the supplication is a reference to chapter 97, verse 3 of the Qur'ān, where the Night of *Qadr* is reckoned to be better than a thousand months:

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

> The Night of Determination is better than a thousand months. (97:3)

... خَيْراً مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

... better than a thousand months

The opportunity of *Laylat al-Qadr* is matchless and outstanding. In a lengthy tradition, Ḥamrān is reported to have asked Imam al-Bāqir ('a): What is meant by '*Laylat al-Qadri khayrun min alfi shahr* (The Night of Determination is better than a thousand months)? The Imam ('a) said:

اَلْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ فِيهَا مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَأَنْوَاعِ الْخَيْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ فِي أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ لَيْسَ فِيهَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ

> A good action in it such as prayer, paying the poor rate, and different kinds of good deeds, is better than that action in a thousand months in which there is no *Laylat al-Qadr*.[1]

1 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-A'māl*, p. 92.

... خَيْراً مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

... better than a thousand months

The fruits of years of struggle can be achieved in a single night. Those who are worried for having wasted past opportunities and not having focused on refining their souls, must understand that it is possible for one to cover a substantial part of the spiritual journey in this night. It is therefore important for them to prepare themselves before the occasion through prayer (*qiyām*) and fasting (*ṣiyām*).

In a lecture he gave on the twenty-first night of the holy month of Ramaḍān 1385 AH (solar calendar) in the *Ḥaram* of Ḥaḍrat Ma'sūmah ('a), the contemporary exegete of the Qur'ān, Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, said:

> Solomon, the Prophet, had the ability to cover the distance of a month in a single morning. However, the miracle of the Noble Qur'ān is in this that a virtuous wayfarer can in a single night on *Laylat al-Qadr* travel the journey of a thousand months: '*Laylat al-Qadr* is better than a thousand months.' (97:3). The difference between the two is that whereas Solomon would cover the distance of physical space, the upholders of the Qur'ān can cover spiritual distance.

Hence, every alert human being will grab the opportunity and exert himself spiritually to soar to the heights of perfection. May Allah enable us to utilise this invaluable opportunity to the maximum.

... أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

... a thousand months

The Night of Determination is innumerably better. The number thousand (*alf*) is also employed to signify abundance (*kathrah*)[2] and not the specific number that follows nine hundred and ninety-nine.

Another example of such usage is when Allah reveals the attitude of some deviant Jews who love this corporeal life and yearn to live therein forever. Allah says:

وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمْ أَحْرَصَ النَّاسِ عَلَىٰ حَيَاةٍ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا ۚ يَوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُزَحْزِحِهِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ أَن يُعَمَّرَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ

> Surely, you will find them the greediest for life of all people, even the idolaters. Each of them is eager to live a thousand years, though it would not deliver him from the punishment, were he to live [that long]. And Allah sees best what they do. (2:96)

Observe that in the above verse Almighty Allah says '*Each of them is eager to live a thousand years*'. Exegetes tell us that the number thousand (*alf*) employed in the verse is not to inform the addressees that the Jews that were attached to the world are only greedy for 1000 years, and not more. Rather it is to inform them that they are very greedy of this life and would like to live for a very long time.

2 Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, v. 30, p. 405.

CHAPTER 13

فَيَا ذَا الْمَنِّ وَلاَ يُمَنُّ عَلَيْكَ،

مُنَّ عَلَيَّ بِفَكَاكِ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ، فِي مَنْ تَمُنُّ عَلَيْهِ

A Commentary on the phrase *Fa yā Dha al-manni wa lā yumannu ʿalay-ka, munna ʿalayya bifakāki raqabatī min al-nār, fī man tamunnu ʿalay-hi*
(Therefore, O Possessor of weighty favours, upon Whom favours cannot be bestowed, favour me with the release of my neck from the Hell-Fire, from among those whom You favour)

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ...

Allah certainly greatly favoured the faithful ... (3:164)

... بَلِ اللهُ يَمُنُّ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ هَدَاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ ...

... *Rather it is Allah who has done you a great favour* in that He has guided you to faith ... (49:17)

وَنُرِيدُ أَن نَّمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ ...

And We desire to greatly favour those who are abased in the land ... (28:5)

يَا ذَا الْمَنِّ

O Possessor of weighty favours

The word *mann* signifies a weighty favour (*al-ni'mah al-thaqīlah*). The Holy Qur'ān employs it in different places. For example:

> **لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ** إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ
>
> Allah certainly greatly favoured the faithful (*laqad manna Allāhu 'alā al-mu'minīn*) when He raised up among them an apostle from themselves to recite to them His signs and to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error. (3:164)
>
> يَمُنُّونَ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ أَسْلَمُوا ۖ قُل لَّا تَمُنُّوا عَلَيَّ إِسْلَامَكُم ۖ **بَلِ اللَّهُ يَمُنُّ عَلَيْكُمْ** أَنْ هَدَاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ
>
> They count it as a great favour to you that they have embraced Islam. Say, 'Do not count it as a favour to me your embracing of Islam. Rather it is Allah who has done you a favour (*bal Allāhu yamunnu 'alaykum*) in that He has guided you to faith, should you be truthful.' (49:17)

يَا ذَا الْمَنِّ ...

O Possessor of weighty favours ...

If the article *al* prefixed in *al-mann* is for genus (*li al-jins*), it would

signify that He is the possessor of *all kinds* of great favours, which is a reality beyond doubt.

يَا ذَا الْمَنِّ ...

O Possessor of weighty favours ...

The definite article *al* prefixed in *al-mann* can refer to a *specific* great favour, which possibly signifies guidance, for according to verse 49:17, *mann* signifies guidance. And since being released from Hell-Fire is equal to attaining guidance in the true and ontological sense, the context of the verse hints that al-mann is guidance.

... وَلاَ يُمَنُّ عَلَيْكَ ...

...who is not given any favour...

Whilst Allah is the Possessor of weighty favours, we declare the fact that He is independent in bestowing favours, and receives no favour from anyone whatsoever. Every kind of perfection is from Him and entirely His property. Hence it is impossible for Him to receive any kind of favour, let alone great favours.

... مُنَّ عَلَيَّ بِفَكَاكِ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ ...

... favour me with the release of my neck from the Hell-Fire ...

Here we are asking for the outstanding favour of getting released from the Hell-Fire. So outstanding is this favour that Imam al-Ḥusayn (ʻa) in his concluding verses of Du'ā' ʻĀrafah says the following:

وَأَسْأَلُكَ اللَّهُمَّ حَاجَتِي إِلَيْكَ الَّتِي إِنْ أَعْطَيْتَنِيهَا لَمْ يَضُرَّنِي مَا مَنَعْتَنِي، وَإِنْ

مَنَعْتَنِيهَا لَمْ يَنْفَعْنِي مَا أَعْطَيْتَنِي، أَسْأَلُكَ فَكَاكَ **رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ**

> And, I ask of You, O Allah, my need, which if You grant to me what You hold back from me will cause me no harm, and if You hold it back from me what You grant me will not profit me: I ask You to *deliver me from the Hell-Fire.*[1]

On the Day of 'Āshūrā', when we address Imam al-Ḥusayn ('a) in the well-known *Ziyarah al-Ta'ziyah*, we say:

يَا مَوْلَاىَ يَا أَبَا عَبْدِاللهِ اَنَا ضَيْفُ اللهِ وَضَيْفُكَ وَجَارُ اللهِ وَجَارُكَ وَلِكُلِّ ضَيْفٍ وَجَارٍ قِرًى وَقِرَايَ فِي هَذَا الْوَقْتِ اَنْ تَسْأَلَ اللهَ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى أَنْ يَرْزُقَنِي **فَكَاكَ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ**

> O my master, O Abā 'Abdillāh, I am Allah's guest and your guest, and Allah's refugee and your refugee; and for every guest and refugee there is a banquet; the banquet I need at this moment is that you ask Allah, Immaculate and Exalted is He, to provide me with the *freedom of my neck from the Hell-Fire.*[2]

In the well-known supplication of *al-Jawshan al-Kabīr*, we address Allah after every ten names as follows:

خَلِّصْنَا مِنَ النَّارِ يَا رَبِّ

Deliver us from the Hell-Fire, O Lord![3]

It is noteworthy that seeking the release (*fakāk*) of oneself from Hell-Fire (*al-Nār*) presumes one's entanglement in the Hell-Fire, otherwise it makes no sense to ask for release, and a different expression instead would be appropriate, for example: 'Do not place me in the Hell-Fire'.

1 Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Arabic ed., p.334.
2 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 98, p. 224.
3 Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Arabic ed., p. 127.

... مُنَّ عَلَيَّ بِفَكَاكِ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ ...

... favour me with the release of my neck from the Hell-Fire ...

According to the insightful scholars[4] the kernel of this world is Hell-Fire. One, therefore, who is attached to this world is entangled in the Hell-Fire. Therefore, releasing oneself from the Fire would require one to struggle to curb one's inner faculties and bring them into the state of their equilibrium and vanquish any remnant of attachment one has to the world.

... مُنَّ عَلَيَّ بِفَكَاكِ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ ...

... favour me with the release of my neck from the Hell-Fire ...

Seeking the release of one's neck from Hell-Fire has also been implicitly alluded to in the Holy Qur'ān:

> فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ. وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ. فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ. أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ. يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ. أَوْ مِسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ,
>
> Yet he has not embarked upon the uphill task. And what will show you what is the uphill task? [It is] the freeing of a slave, or feeding [the needy] on a day of starvation, or an orphan among relatives, or a needy man in desolation. (90:11-16)

Al-'Aqabah in verse 11 above that we have rendered as 'uphill task' is a difficult path which entails climbing the hill.[5]

The exoteric and outer interpretation of the abovementioned verses is clear and we would not like to expound more on it. In short, the *'aqabah* which is an uphill path is equated with spending

4 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, v. 6, p. 344.
5 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, v. 20, p. 292.

open-handedly in the way of Allah by freeing a slave, feeding the poor on a day of starvation or an orphan from among one's relatives or a needy man in desolation. One who performs such tasks has really embarked upon the uphill path.

The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have also enlightened us with the inner meaning of the verses which are worthy of mention here:

Shaykh al-Huwayzī in his *Tafsīr Nūr al-Thaqalayn* under verse 11 of chapter 90 brings the following noteworthy *ḥadīth*:

> Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said about the following verses, '*Yet he has not embarked upon the uphill task (al-'aqabah). And what will show you what is the uphill task?* [It is] the freeing of a slave... ' that He (Allah) meant by His word '*fakku raqabah* (freeing a slave)' the guardianship (*wilāyah*) of Amīr al-mu'minīn ('a), for indeed that is *fakku raqabah* (freeing a slave).[6]

In another *ḥadīth* again reported from Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a), Abān ibn Taghlib asks the Imam ('a) about the verse '*Yet he has not embarked upon the uphill task (al-'aqabah)*' and he says:

> مَنْ أَكْرَمَهُ اللهُ بِوِلاَيَتِنَا، فَقَدْ جَازَ الْعَقَبَةَ، وَنَحْنُ تِلْكَ الْعَقَبَةُ الَّتِيْ مَنْ اِقْتَحَمَهَا نَجَا
>
> Whosoever is ennobled by Allah through our *wilāyah* has indeed crossed the *uphill path*; and we are that uphill path upon which if one embarks, he will be emancipated.[7]

Other traditions also clearly inform us that the uphill path is the guardianship of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). However they also add that one who follows their *wilāyah* gets freed from Hell-Fire. And that is the inner meaning of freeing a slave.

6 Shaykh Huwayzī, *Tafsīr Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, v. 5, p. 664.
7 Sayyid al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v. 5, p. 663.

Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said the following about Allah's words 'freeing a slave (*fakku raqabah*)':

النَّاسُ كُلُّهُمْ عَبِيدُ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَنْ دَخَلَ فِي طَاعَتِنَا وَوَلَايَتِنَا **فَقَدْ فَكَّ رَقَبَتَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ**، وَ**الْعَقَبَةُ** وَلَايَتُنَا

All of mankind are the slaves of Hell-Fire save one who enters into our obedience and our guardianship, *for verily such a person has freed his neck from Hell-Fire*, and *al-'Aqabah* [in the verse] is our *wilāyah* (guardianship).[8]

Hence, while we say '*munna 'alayya bifakāki raqabatī min al-nār*' we must resolve to completely adhere to the *wilāyah* of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), for that is the 'aqabah that would free us from Hell-Fire. It is noteworthy to find the imperative verb *munna* in this supplication, which tells us that what we are asking is a weighty bounty.

There are other traditions that also teach us acts that would deliver us from Hell-Fire. We must understand them in light of the aforementioned traditions. Examples of these are:

1. Imam al-Ṣādiq ('a) is reported to have said:

إِذَا فَرَغَ أَحَدُكُمْ مِنْ وُضُوئِهِ فَلْيَأْخُذْ كَفّاً مِنْ مَاءٍ فَلْيَمْسَحْ بِهِ قَفَاهُ **يَكُونُ ذَلِكَ فَكَاكَ رَقَبَتِهِ مِنَ النَّارِ**

When anyone of you is over with his *Wuḍū'* he must take a palm of water and wipe with it on the back of his neck; *and that would bring about the freedom of his neck from Hell-Fire.*[9]

8 Al-Istrābādī, *Ta'wīl al-Āyāt al-Ẓāhirah fī Faḍā'il al-'Itrah al-Ṭāhirah*, p. 773.
9 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 3, p. 72.

2. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) is reported to have said:

مَنْ زَارَ قَبْرَ الْحُسَيْنِ (ع) لِلّٰهِ وَفِي اللّٰهِ **أَعْتَقَهُ اللّٰهُ مِنَ النَّارِ**

Whosoever visits Imam al-Husayn (‘a) for the sake of Allah and in the way of Allah, *Allah will free him from the Hell-Fire.*[10]

3. Imam al-Ḥusayn (‘a) is reported to have said:

سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللّٰهِ (ص) يَقُولُ: مَنْ وَجَدَ لُقْمَةً فَمَسَحَ مِنْهَا أَوْ غَسَلَ مَا عَلَيْهَا ثُمَّ أَكَلَهَا، لَمْ تَسْتَقِرّ فِي جَوْفِهِ **إِلَّا أَعْتَقَهُ اللّٰهُ مِنَ النَّارِ**

I heard the Apostle of Allah (ṣ) say: Whosoever finds a morsel of food, and then wipes over it [removing the dirt on it] or washes what is on it [of dirt], and then eats it, it does not settle in his stomach *save that Allah frees him from the Hell-Fire.*[11]

4. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates the following tradition from Imam al-Riḍā (‘a) who narrates it from his grandfathers, regarding Imam al-Ḥusayn (‘a):

أَنَّهُ دَخَلَ الْمُسْتَرَاحَ فَوَجَدَ لُقْمَةً مُلْقَاةً فَدَفَعَهَا إِلَى غُلَامٍ لَهُ، فَقَالَ: يَا غُلَامُ اُذْكُرْنِي بِهَذِهِ اللُّقْمَةِ إِذَا خَرَجْتُ فأَكَلَهَا الْغُلَامُ، فَلَمَّا خَرَجَ الْحُسَيْنُ (ع) قَالَ: يَا غُلَامُ اللُّقْمَةُ؟ قَالَ: أَكَلْتُهَا يَا مَوْلَايَ قَالَ: أَنْتَ حُرٌّ لِوَجْهِ اللّٰهِ، قَالَ لَهُ رَجُلٌ: أَعْتَقْتَهُ يَا سَيِّدِي؟ قَالَ: نَعَمْ، سَمِعْتُ جَدِّي رَسُولَ اللّٰهِ (ص) يَقُولُ: **مَنْ وَجَدَ لُقْمَةً فَمَسَحَ مِنْهَا أَوْ غَسَلَ مِنْهَا ثُمَّ أَكَلَهَا لَمْ تَسْتَقِرّ فِي جَوْفِهِ إِلَّا أَعْتَقَهُ اللّٰهُ مِنَ النَّارِ**، وَلَمْ أَكُنْ أَسْتَعْبِدُ رَجُلًا أَعْتَقَهُ اللّٰهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

Imam al-Ḥusayn (‘a) [once] entered the washroom and saw a morsel of food that had fallen. He [picked it up and] gave it to his slave and said to him: O man, remind me of this morsel when I come out. Thereafter the slave

10 Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 146.

11 ‘Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 63, p. 433.

[instead of keeping the morsel] ate it. Then when Imam al-Ḥusayn (ʿa) came out, he said to the slave: O man, where is the morsel? He said: I ate it, O my master. Imam al-Ḥusayn (ʿa) said to him: You are free for the sake of Allah. A person nearby said to the Imam (ʿa): You freed him, O my master? The Imam (ʿa) said: Yes, for I heard my grandfather the Apostle of Allah (ṣ) saying: *whosoever finds a morsel of food and he wipes it or washes it and thereafter eats it, before it settles in his stomach Allah frees him from Hell-Fire.* And I cannot enslave a person whom Allah has freed from the Hell-Fire.[12]

5. Imam ʿAlī (ʿa) is reported to have said:

وَمَنْ أَحْيَا لَيْلَةً مِنْ لَيَالِي رَجَبٍ **أَعْتَقَهُ اللهُ مِنَ النَّارِ**، وَقُبِلَ شَفَاعَتُهُ فِي سَبْعِينَ أَلْفَ رَجُلٍ مِنَ الْمُذْنِبِينَ

And whosoever keeps awake one night from the nights of Rajab, *Allah will free him from Hell-Fire* and accept his intercession for seventy thousand sinners.[13]

6. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

مَنْ أَعْتَقَ مُؤْمِناً أَعْتَقَ اللهُ عَز وَجَلَّ بِكُلِّ عُضْوٍ مِنْهُ عُضْواً مِنَ النَّارِ ...

Whosoever frees a faithful, Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, will free with every part of his [the faithful's] body, a part of his body from Hell-Fire...[14]

We may try to ask ourselves that the opportunity of freeing slaves is not within our reach in the contemporary era, and hence the above tradition is not applicable to us. However, in light of other traditions the above tradition is applicable to us today: Imam

12 *Ibid.*

13 ʿAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 94, p. 33.

14 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 6, p. 180.

al-Ṣādiq (‘a) is reported to have said:

سُئِلَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَلِيٍّ (ع) مَا يَعْدِلُ عِتْقَ رَقَبَةٍ؟ قَالَ: إِطْعَامُ رَجُلٍ مُسْلِمٍ

> Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī [al-Bāqir (‘a)] was asked the equivalent of freeing a slave, and he said: Feeding a Muslim man.[15]

... مُنَّ عَلَيَّ بِفَكَاكِ رَقَبَتِي مِنَ النَّارِ ...

... favour me with the release of my neck from the Hell-Fire ...

Here we seek release from Hell-Fire, depending on the level we are in. This is because there are different levels of Hell-Fire. One is the well-known level that has been mentioned in different verses of the Holy Qur’ān and traditions of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) and his infallible progeny. Another is a level of Hell-Fire which is beyond the comprehension of the common servants of God. It requires exalted people to be fearful of such fire. According to the insightful scholars, such fire is more intense than the normal fire. Amīr al-mu’minīn (‘a) is reported to have said:

نَارُ الْفُرْقَةِ أَحَرُّ مِنْ نَارِ **جَهَنَّمَ**

The fire of separation is hotter that the Fire of *Jahannam.*[16]

In his well-known supplication that he taught to Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī, he says:

فَهَبْنِي يَا إِلَهِي وَسَيِّدِي وَمَوْلَايَ وَرَبِّي صَبَرْتُ عَلَى عَذَابِكَ، **فَكَيْفَ أَصْبِرُ عَلَى فِرَاقِكَ؟** وَهَبْنِي صَبَرْتُ عَلَى حَرِّ نَارِكَ، فَكَيْفَ أَصْبِرُ عَنِ النَّظَرِ إِلَى كَرَامَتِكَ

> Then suppose, My God, my Master, my Guardian and my Lord that I am able to endure Your chastisement, *how can I endure separation from You*? And suppose

15 Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, v. 2, p. 393.
16 *Al-Mawā‘iẓ al-‘Adadiyyah*, p. 61.

that I am able to endure the heat of Your fire, How can I endure not gazing upon Your greatness?[17]

Hence those who are gifted with high levels of spirituality and can appreciate the higher meanings of the divine attributes, can appreciate what it means to be distant from the Absolute Perfect Being.

فِي مَنْ تَمُنُّ عَلَيْهِ

from among those whom you favour

According to a tradition, every night in the holy month of Ramaḍān many fasting ones are released from the Hell-Fire.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa) is reported to have said:

> إِنَّ لِلّٰهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فِي كُلِّ لَيْلَةٍ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ **عُتَقَاءَ وَطُلَقَاءَ مِنَ النَّارِ** إِلَّا مَنْ أَفْطَرَ عَلَى مُسْكِرٍ
>
> Indeed Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, every night of the month of Ramaḍān, *has slaves emancipated and freed from Hell-Fire*, except one who breaks one's fast with an intoxicant.[18]

The phrase '*fī man tamunnu ʻalay-hi* (from among those whom you favour)' aptly alludes to this reality.

17 Shaykh ʻAbbās Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Arabic ed., p.102.
18 Shaykh al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, v. 4, p. 68.

CHAPTER 14

وَأَدْخِلْنِي الْجَنَّةَ

A Commentary on the phrase *Wa adkhilnī al-Jannata*
(And place me in the Garden of Heaven)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ ...

Allah will indeed admit those who have faith and do balanced deeds into gardens ... (22:14)

وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

And enter My Garden (89:30)

وَأَدْخِلْنِي الْجَنَّةَ

And place me in the Garden [of Heaven]

The interrogative verb *adkhilnī* here signifies a subtlety worthy of mention: The servant wants the Mawlā Himself to make him enter Heaven. Such an expression also appears in the Holy Qur'ān as follows:

... فَمَن زُحْزِحَ عَنِ النَّارِ **وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ** فَقَدْ فَازَ ...

> ... Whoever is delivered from the Fire and *admitted to the Garden of Heaven* has certainly succeeded ... (3:185)

Notice the phrase '*wa udkhila al-jannah*' is employed, meaning 'he was made to enter'.

In chapter 3, verse 195, there is a clear mention that Allah Himself makes the good servants enter the Garden of Heaven:

... فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِن دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُوذُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ **وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ** تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِندَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ

> ... So those who migrated and were expelled from their homes, and were tormented in My way, and those who fought and were killed - I will surely absolve them of their misdeeds *and I will surely admit them into gardens* with streams running in them, as a reward from Allah, and Allah, with Him is the best of rewards. (3:195)

In this verse the phrase '*wa la-udkhilannahum jannāt* (and I will surely admit them into gardens)' is employed which reveals great

emphasis in Allah Himself admitting the righteous servants into the Gardens of Heaven.

In chapter 4, verse 13, Allah says:

> ... وَمَن يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ **يُدْخِلْهُ** جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ
>
> ...and whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle, He *shall admit* him to gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them [forever]. That is the great success. (4:13)

Here again Allah says that He Himself will admit one who obeys Allah and His Apostle. The phrase *yudkhilhu* (He shall admit him) refers to this.

In chapter 4, verse 57, we have a similar mention:

> وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ **سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ** تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ۖ لَّهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ ۖ وَنُدْخِلُهُمْ ظِلًّا ظَلِيلًا
>
> As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, *We shall admit them into gardens* with streams running in them, to remain in them forever. In it there will be chaste mates for them, and We shall admit them into a deep shade. (4:57)

In chapter 5, verse 65, Allah says:

> وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَكَفَّرْنَا عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ **وَلَأَدْخَلْنَاهُمْ جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ**
>
> And had the People of the Book believed and been God-wary, We would surely have absolved them of their misdeeds *and admitted them into gardens of bliss.* (5:65)

Other verses likewise have similar expressions, which show that it is the All-Beloved who admits His good servants into the Gardens of Heaven. We would like to suffice ourselves here with the few that have been mentioned.

Hence, when we recite '*wa adkhilnī al-jannah*' we must realise the importance of our expression. O Allah, it is extremely intoxicating when it is You who says that You will place us in Jannah!

وَأَدْخِلْنِي الْجَنَّةَ

And place me in the Garden [of Heaven]

While we seek the Garden of Heaven from Almighty Allah, we must try to understand and seek the causes that facilitate the same. There are so many verses of the Holy Qur'ān and narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) that teach us the path towards Heaven. The following are some noteworthy examples:

1. The Holy Qur'ān says:

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ **أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ** ...

> And give good news to those who have faith and do balanced deeds, *that for them shall be gardens*… (2:25)

This verse conveys a universal principle that says that one who has proper belief and performs balanced deeds will be availed with *Jannah*. This actually informs us that *Jannah* is a place of elevation, for the principle for achieving elevation that we mentioned earlier is the same principle for attaining the Garden of Heaven.

2. The Holy Qur'ān, mentioning the same principle, says:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ **أُولَـٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ** ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

And those who have faith and do balanced deeds *they shall be the inhabitants of the Garden [of Heaven]*; they shall remain in it (2:82)

3. The Holy Qur'ān reckons those who observe God-wariness (*taqwā*) to be those who would enjoy the Gardens of Heaven:

... لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا **عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ** تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ...

... For those who are God-wary *there will be gardens near their Lord*, with streams running in them... (3:15)

4. The Holy Qur'ān reckons those who struggle in Allah's path and attain martyrdom to be among the people of *Jannah*:

... فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِن دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُوذُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ **وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ** ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِندَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ

... So those who migrated and were expelled from their homes, and were tormented in My way, and those who fought and were killed - I will surely absolve them of their misdeeds *and I will surely admit them into gardens with streams running in them*, as a reward from Allah, and Allah, with Him is the best of rewards. (3:195)

5. Another verse that speaks of *Jannah* to be the reward of martyrdom is the following:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَىٰ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُم **بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ** ۚ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ ۖ وَعْدًا عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا فِي التَّوْرَاةِ وَالْإِنجِيلِ وَالْقُرْآنِ ...

Indeed Allah has bought from the faithful their souls and their possessions for the *Garden of Heaven* to be theirs: they fight in the way of Allah, kill, and are killed. A promise binding upon Him in the Torah and the Evangel and the Qur'ān... (9:111)

6. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

لِلّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ تِسْعَةٌ وَ تِسْعُونَ اسْماً مَنْ دَعَا اللّهَ بِهَا اسْتَجَابَ لَهُ، **وَمَنْ أَحْصَاهَا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ**

Allah, the Invincible and Majestic, has ninety-nine names, by which whosoever calls Allah He will respond to him, *and whososever enumerates them will enter the Garden of Heaven.*[1]

Enumeration here does not mean vocalisation, but assimilation and exemplification. In simpler words, it means whosoever acquires them [according to his limit] enters the Garden of Heaven.

7. Imam al-Ṣādiq (‘a) is reported to have narrated the following:

إِنَّ قَوْماً أَتَوْا رَسُولَ اللهِ (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) فَقَالُوا: يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ **اضْمَنْ لَنَا عَلَى رَبِّكَ الْجَنَّةَ**، قَالَ: فَقَالَ: عَلَى أَنْ تُعِينُونِي بِطُولِ السُّجُودِ، قَالُوا: نَعَمْ يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ، **فَضَمِنَ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ**، قَالَ: فَبَلَغَ ذَلِكَ قَوْماً مِنَ الْأَنْصَارِ فَأَتَوْهُ، فَقَالُوا: يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ **اضْمَنْ لَنَا الْجَنَّةَ**، قَالَ: عَلَى أَنْ لَا تَسْأَلُوا أَحَداً شَيْئاً، قَالُوا: نَعَمْ يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ، قَالَ: **فَضَمِنَ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ**، فَكَانَ الرَّجُلُ مِنْهُمْ يَسْقُطُ سَوْطُهُ وَهُوَ عَلَى دَابَّتِهِ فَيَنْزِلُ حَتَّى يَتَنَاوَلَهُ، كَرَاهِيَةَ أَنْ يَسْأَلَ أَحَداً شَيْئاً،

Indeed a people came to the Apostle of Allah (ṣ) and said: O Apostle of Allah, *guarantee for us from your Lord the Garden of Heaven.* He (ṣ) said: On the condition that you assist me with lengthy prostration. They said: We agree, O Apostle of Allah (ṣ); *so the Apostle of Allah (ṣ) guaranteed for them the Garden of Heaven.* So a group of people from the Anṣār came to learn of this incident, and they came to him (ṣ) and said: O Apostle of Allah (ṣ), *guarantee for us the Garden of Heaven.* He (ṣ) said: On the condition that

1 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 195.

you do not ask anything from anyone. They said: We agree, O Apostle of Allah (ṣ). *So the Apostle of Allah guaranteed for them the Garden of Heaven.* Thus a whip of a person from them would fall while he would be on his mount, whereupon he would come down to pick it up himself, in order not to ask anyone for anything.[2]

8. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

مَنْ عَالَ بِنْتاً مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَلَهُ الْجَنَّة

Whosoever supports one daughter [among the Muslims] will have the Garden of Heaven.[3]

9. Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa) in a lengthy conversation with his companion Abū ʻAmārah is reported to have said:

وَمَنْ أَنْشَدَ فِي الْحُسَيْنِ (ع) شِعْراً فَأَبْكَى وَاحِداً **فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ**، وَمَنْ أَنْشَدَ فِي الْحُسَيْنِ (ع) شِعْراً فَبَكَى **فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ**، وَمَنْ أَنْشَدَ فِي الْحُسَيْنِ شِعْراً فَتَبَاكَى **فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ**

And whosoever recites one poem on al-Ḥusayn (ʻa) and makes one person cry, *will have the Garden of Heaven*, and whosoever recites one poem on al-Ḥusayn and cries [himself], *will have the Garden of Heaven*, and whosoever recites one poem on al-Ḥusayn and makes his face in such a way as if he is crying, *will have the Garden of Heaven.*[4]

10. Imam al-Ṣādiq (ʻa) is reported to have said:

مَنْ زَارَ عَلِيّاً بَعْدَ وَفَاتِهِ، **فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ**

Whosoever visits ʻAli after his demise, *will have the Garden of Heaven.*

2 Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 664.

3 Al-Iḥṣā'ī, *'Awāli' al-La'ālī*, v. 3, p. 294.

4 Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 105.

11. The Holy Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

مَنْ زَارَ الْحُسَيْنِ (عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ) بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ، **فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ**

> Whosoever visits al-Husayn (ʻa) after his demise, *will have the Garden of Heaven.*

12. Imam Mūsā ibn Jaʻfar al-Kāẓim (ʻa) is reported to have said:

مَنْ زَارَ ابْنِي هَذَا وَأَوْمَأَ بِيَدِهِ إِلَى أَبِي الْحَسَنِ الرِّضَا (ع) **فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ**

> Whosoever visits this son of mine (and the Imam pointed at Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā (ʻa)) *will have the Garden of Heaven.*[5]

13. Imam al-Jawād (ʻa) is reported to have said:

مَنْ زَارَ قَبْرَ عَمَّتِي بِقُمَّ **فَلَهُ الْجَنَّةُ**

> Whosoever visits the grave of my aunt in Qum *will have the Garden of Heaven.*[6]

14. Imam al-Riḍā (ʻa) is reported to have said:

السَّخِيُّ قَرِيبٌ مِنَ اللهِ **قَرِيبٌ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ** قَرِيبٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ بَعِيدٌ مِنَ النَّارِ
وَالْبَخِيلُ بَعِيدٌ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ بَعِيدٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ قَرِيبٌ النَّارِ

> The openhanded one is close to Allah, *close to the Garden of Heaven*, close to the people, and distant from Hell-Fire; and the miserly one is distant from the Garden of Heaven, distant from the people, close to Hell-Fire.[7]

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5 ʻAllāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, v. 99, p. 41.
6 Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, p. 324.
7 Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʻUyun Akhbār al-Riḍā (ʻa)*, v. 2, p. 12.

الْجَنَّةَ

Garden [of Heaven]

The definite article *al* prefixed in *al-Jannah* can be employed to signify something specific and in this case it can refer to a specific *Jannah* (Garden of Heaven). And since a believer's aspiration is always exalted and high (*'ālī*), he would opt for the highest level of the Gardens of Heaven which the insightful call *Jannat al-Liqā'* (the Garden of Meeting Allah). It is this kind of Garden that is spoken about in the concluding verses of *Sūrat al-Fajr*, where Almighty Allah addressing the serene soul, says:

وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

And enter My Garden. (89:30)

الْجَنَّةَ

Garden [of Heaven]

Interestingly, the word '*jannah*' refers to a specific kind of garden. Its root (*jīm*, *nūn*) means 'to hide (*al-satr*)'.[8] And *Jannah* was so called because the trees [in the Garden] hide [and cover] it. Ibn al-Athīr, defining *al-jannah*, says that it is from *al-ijtinān* which is *al-satr* (to hide), and that is because of the thickening of its trees, and because it is overshadowed by the coiling of their branches.[9]

أَدْخِلْنِي الْجَنَّةَ

place me in the Garden [of Heaven]

It is possible that the supplicant seeks the Garden of Heaven

8 Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, v. 1, p. 421.

9 Ibn Athīr, *al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, v. 1, p. 307.

during his supplication, and does not only ask for the same at a later stage (i.e. during death or Resurrection). The reality, as the Holy Qur'ān and the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) clearly teach, is that one is either in Paradise while still residing in this world or in the Hell-Fire. If the curtains were unveiled (*law kushifa al-ghiṭā'*) for him he would see other dimensions of his reality (such as the *barzakhī* reality), which would either depict bliss and paradise or agony and fire.

The following are noteworthy anecdotes:

1) Abū Dharr's Ailing Situation
Imam 'Alī ('a) is reported to have said:

> وُعِكَ أَبُو ذَرٍّ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ فَأَتَيْتُ رَسُولَ اللهِ (ص) فَقُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ إِنَّ أَبَا ذَرٍّ قَدْ وُعِكَ، فَقَالَ: امْضِ بِنَا إِلَيْهِ نَعُودُهُ، فَمَضَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ جَمِيعاً، فَلَمَّا جَلَسْنَا قَالَ رَسُولَ اللهِ (ص): كَيْفَ أَصْبَحْتَ يَا أَبَا ذَرٍّ؟ قَالَ: أَصْبَحْتُ وَعِكاً يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ، فَقَالَ: أَصْبَحْتَ فِي رَوْضَةٍ مِنْ رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ
>
> Abū Dharr [once] became sick; so I came to the Apostle of Allah (ṣ) and said: O Apostle of Allah, indeed Abū Dharr has fallen sick. He said: let us go to visit him, and so we went collectively to visit him. And when we sat beside him, the Apostle of Allah (ṣ) asked him: O Abā Dharr, how did you confront your morning? He said: I have confronted the morning in sickness. The Holy Prophet thereupon said: Surely you have confronted the morning while you are in a garden among the gardens of Paradise.[10]

2) Reciting *Ziyārah Amīnullah*
In the introduction to his anthology *Shahrullāh fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, when explaining the kind of divine banquet that

10 Mīrzā Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, v. 1, p. 57.

believers should anticipate in the holy month of Ramaḍān, Āyatullāh Rayshahrī quotes *al-Risālah al-Majdiyyah* of Shaykh Riḍā al-Iṣfahānī, where the latter explains the kind of divine repast that the believers are invited to. At one point he says:

> فقد سمعت مرّات وكرات ممّن هو أقرب الناس إليّ حسبا ونسبا، أنه يقول: كنت في أحد أيّام شهر رمضان مشغولاً بالزيارة المعروفة بزيارة أمين اللهِ في المرقد الشريف بالنجف، وحين وصلت بعبارات الزيارة إلى: **وموآئد المستطعمين معدَةٌ**؛ ... وفيما أنا أتأمّل بمعناها وأفكّر به، تراءت لي فجأة مائدة مصفوف عليها أنواع الأطعمة والأشربة ممّا لم أكن أتصوّره قطّ، وأنا أتناول من طعامها، وفي تلك الأثناء كنت أفكّر بمسألة فقهية، إنّها حالة عجيبة تبعث على الدهشة! الواقع أن هذه هي حقيقة الغذاء، وهي ليست مفطرة للصوم
>
> Indeed I have heard several times and repeatedly from one who is closest to me in terms of relationship and kinship saying: I was busy reciting the well-known *Ziyārah Amīnullah* in the holy sanctuary in Najaf, and when I reached the verse '*wa mawā'id al-mustaṭ'imīna mu'addah* (and the banquets of those who seek sustenance are ready)'... and reflected over its meaning and thought about it, I was suddenly made to see a banquet on which lay different kinds of food and drinks, which I had never thought of, and I was eating from them, and in the course of that state I was contemplating about an Islamic ruling. Surely it is an amazing state which renders one perplexed! The truth is that this is the reality of [Heavenly] food, which does not break the fast.[11]

Al-Iṣfahānī later continues and says:

11 Āyatullāh Rayshahrī, *Shahrullāh fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, p. 21.

ولا تظنّنّ أنَّ تعبيرات هذا العبد هي من قبيل خيالات الشعراء وأوهامهم، أو من شطحيّات غلاة المتصوّفة، فحاشي أن أتجاوز لسان الكتاب والسنّة، أو أتخطّى في معتقدي غير ما جاء به الله والنّبي وأمرا به، وإنّما المقصود هو قول اللهِ نفسه في سورة هل أتى حيث يقول «وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا» :يبحانه

Do not think that the expressions of this servant resembles the imaginations of the poets and their vain ideas or the theopathetic utterances (*shaṭaḥiyyat*) of the extremist socalled sufis (*mutaṣawwifah*). I dare not transcend the bounds of the speech of the Book of God and the *Sunnah*, or adopt a course in my belief that is other than what Allah and His Messenger brought and ordered [us to follow]. What I only mean here is the word of Allah in chapter *Hal Ata* where Allah says: ‘*wa saqāhum Rabbuhum sharāban ṭahūran* (and their Lord made them drink a pure drink.’ (76:21))

These two anecdotes depict the existence of *Jannah* in *Barzakh* (the Intermediate Realm). Only those whose visions have no hurdles can easily behold their higher levels. *Barzakh*, as the insightful scholars explain, is not a separate phase in time that succeeds this world, but rather the higher level or the kernel of this very material world. Hence, while one still inhabits this world, he can be in Paradise in the higher realm of his own existence too. Consider this beautiful saying reported from Amīr al-mu’minīn (‘a) carefully:

وَاللهِ إِنَّ صَائِمَكُمْ لَيَرْتَعُ فِي رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ تَدْعُو لَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ بِالْفَوْزِ حَتَّى يُفْطِرَ

I swear by Allah, indeed the fasting one among you is enjoying in the gardens of Paradise, and the angels pray for his success until he breaks his fast.[12]

12 Shaykh Ṭabrasī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, p. 170.

CHAPTER 15

بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ

A Commentary on the phrase *Biraḥmati-ka yā Arḥama al-rāḥimīn* (By Your mercy, O Most Merciful of the merciful ones)

... فَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ حَافِظًا ۖ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

... Yet Allah is the Best of protectors, *and He is the Most Merciful of merciful ones* (12:64)

بِرَحْمَتِكَ ...

By Your mercy...

The preposition *bi* in the above phrase is employed for taking an oath. It is technically referred to as *bā' al-qasam* (*bā'* employed for an oath). Swearing by God's mercy is for the purpose of attracting His favour.

بِرَحْمَتِكَ ...

By Your mercy...

The preposition *bi* in the above phrase can be employed to signify mediation (*sababiyyah*). In simple words, when we say '*bi raḥmatika*', we mean 'Through Your mercy' or '*By means of Your mercy*'. Hence considering the preceding phrase we are saying '... and place me in the Garden of Heaven, through Your mercy... '

بِرَحْمَتِكَ ...

By Your mercy...

The mercy spoken about here is His special mercy, which comes under the cover of His allcomprehensive mercy (*al-Raḥmah al-Raḥmāniyyah*). Emancipation from Hell-Fire and entry into Paradise are among the manifestations of *al-Raḥmah al-Raḥmāniyyah* (The special divine mercy signified by the name *al-Raḥīm*).

... يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ

... O Most Merciful of the merciful ones

Although we say He is the Most Merciful of the merciful ones, the insightful scholars know that there exists no mercy other than His, and all other kinds and levels of mercy are the manifestations of His mercy.

May the Almighty enable us understand the depths of this beautiful supplication as we continue our journey to His proximity.

Wa al-ḥamdu lillāhi Rabbi al-ʿĀlamin

Shahru Ramaḍān al-Mubārak 1434 AH
Holy Proximity of Ḥaḍrat Maʿṣūmah (ʿa)
Qum al-Muqaddasah

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SEEKING ELEVATION

A Short Commentary on One of the Regularly Recited Daily Supplications of the Holy Month of Ramaḍān

The human being originated from an elevated realm and naturally aspires to return to the same elevated realm. The Holy Qur'an educates us that the path towards elevation is firm belief and balanced action. If we adopt a life that is composed of these two important elements we will always head towards elevation.

The supplication Ya 'Aliyyu Ya Azimu of the Holy Month of Ramadhan serves as both a reminder as well as a means towards elevation. Reciting it after every prayer in this Holy Month reminds the human being about his true destination, and enables him to soar higher. We must however realize that the bearers of religion have taught us specific actions of elevation. Hence, as we supplicate to Allah with this beautiful prayer, we must actively engage in those actions that religion introduces as the means of perfection.

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